



Cold and Flu Care

A Cold is an Upper Respiratory Infection Caused by a Virus

Symptoms include runny nose, sneezing, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, low fever, and congestion of the ears, nose and head. Colds usually last for a few days, but can persist for weeks.

Influenza, or “The Flu,” is Caused By a Virus, Usually in Winter

Symptoms, which include high fever and cough, are more severe than cold symptoms. Flu usually has a sudden onset and lasts 1-2 weeks. Complications are uncommon in young, healthy people but may include pneumonia, bronchitis, ear or sinus infections. Consider getting a flu shot to protect yourself.

Self Care

- Lots of liquids. Drink 6-8 cups daily. Avoid alcohol.
- Plenty of rest. You can continue daily activities with mild symptoms. If symptoms are severe, take it easy until you feel better
- Moist air from a humidifier or hot shower can ease symptoms and help you breathe.
- Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke. Smoking prolongs symptoms and increases risk of complications.
- Be patient. A cold or flu may last 2 days or 2 weeks. Take care of yourself so your body can heal.

Medication Information

There’s no cure for a cold or flu, and no medicines that kill these viruses. Antibiotics kill bacteria, so they don’t help with viral infections. Over-the-counter products can relieve symptoms. Choose a single medicine for a specific symptom rather than an all-in-one preparation. If you do take an all-in-one, check ingredients to be sure you’re not “doubling up” with medicines you’re taking separately (such as pain medications). Generics are as effective as brand names, and much cheaper. We list active ingredients in brand names on the next page. Any medicine has potential side effects. Read labels carefully for warnings, follow instructions, and use only as needed. *Continued on back...*

Medication to Help Relieve Symptoms

- **Decongestants:** Medicines with pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) can help congestion. Antihistamines relieve congestion and sneezing from hay fever and allergies, but they are not effective against colds and flu.
- **Nasal Sprays/Drops:** Saline will thin secretions and help unblock a stuffy nose. Make some by mixing 1/4 teaspoon salt in 4 oz. water, or buy saline nose drops. Medications with oxymetazoline (Afrin) shrink mucous membranes. These can cause rebound congestion, so use with caution.
- **Pain Medications:** For fever, headache, or muscle aches use acetaminophen (Tylenol), aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil), or naproxen (Aleve).
- **Cough Drops:** Cough drops and lozenges help keep the throat moist and they can lessen discomfort and dry cough.
- **Cough Suppressants:** A productive cough serves a function, so it's best not to suppress it. But if a cough is dry, irritating, or keeps you awake, cough syrup may help. Cough syrups are either: "suppressant" or "expectorant." For a suppressant, use a preparation with dextromethorphan. For a tight cough, look for an expectorant with guaifenesin.
- **Anesthetic Throat Spray:** Can help throat pain. Products such as Chloroseptic numb the throat so that swallowing is less painful. Gargle with warm salt water (1/2 teaspoon salt in 8 oz. water) every 2 hours to reduce throat pain.

Complications

Contact the UHS 24/7 Advice Nurse at (510) 643-7197 if you have:

- Symptoms lasting more than 3 weeks, or a fever over 100°F for more than 5 days. Fever over 102°F, or over 101°F with severe sore throat for 24 hours.
- Severe chest pain. Difficulty breathing or swallowing.
- Cough or nasal discharge that's bloody, brown, or green. Recent close contact with someone with strep throat. Severe headache, ear pain/discharge, or pain in cheeks/teeth.
- Fever with rash, stiff neck, irritability, or confusion. Sudden or persistent hearing loss.
- Dehydration: Extreme thirst, infrequent urination, dark urine, feeling light-headed.

Prevention

- Wash your hands frequently with water and soap for 15 seconds.
- Avoid touching your face and sharing objects (cups, utensils, etc).
- Cover your mouth with a tissue when coughing/sneezing. Dispose of tissue, wash hands.
- Be good to yourself! Drink water, avoid alcohol, sleep, exercise, eat healthy, reduce stress.
- Visit uhs.berkeley.edu/health-topics/colds-and-flu for more information.