

Colds, Coughs and Sore Throats

If you have a new sore throat, cough or cold symptoms.

- Most coughs, colds and sore throats are caused by acute, self-limited, uncomplicated viral infections. These conditions usually run their course within 7-10 days. **Antibiotics do not treat viral infections.**
- If you have a new sore throat, cough or congestion, you can **self-order a COVID PCR test** on the eTang portal. You will be contacted with your test result on the eTang portal.
- If you have a sore throat only, you can **self-order a strep throat test, in addition to a COVID PCR test** on the eTang portal. Strep throat is an exception to most colds in that it is treated with an antibiotic. If your strep throat test is positive, you will be contacted on the eTang portal regarding treatment.

How do I treat my symptoms?

The treatment for these acute, self-limited, uncomplicated viral infections includes getting adequate rest and keeping well hydrated. Sources of hydration include water, juice, coconut water, herbal tea and clear soup broth. **Antibiotics do not treat viral infections.**

In addition, you can take **over-the-counter medication** to help reduce your symptoms. These medications include acetaminophen or ibuprofen for aches/pain/fevers and other cold medications for the treatment of cough and congestion. You should not use these over-the-counter medications if you have an allergy to any of the listed ingredients. Do not take over-the-counter cold medications at a dose or frequency that is more than what is listed on the instructions unless you are recommended to do so by your healthcare provider.

Am I contagious?

While you are recovering from your illness, you can take basic precautions to minimize the risk of spreading the infection to others.

Here are **3 key steps** to follow:

1. Basic precautions include not sharing drinks or food utensils, washing your hands regularly and avoiding close, prolonged contact with others when possible.
2. Practice [healthy habits](#) around coughing and sneezing.
3. Follow the CDC's [current recommendations](#) on Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You Are Sick.

When should I follow-up with the Tang Center if I am not feeling better or if I am feeling worse?

You should follow-up at the Tang Center if

- You have been sick for more than 7 days **AND** you do not feel that your symptoms are improving. You can schedule an **in person Primary Care appointment** on the eTang portal or by calling the Appointment Office (510) 642-2000.

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- You have been sick for more than 3 days **AND** your symptoms are worsening. You can schedule a **Same Day Primary Care appointment** (in-person, phone or video) on the eTang portal or contact the Advice Nurse at (510) 643-7197.
- If you have any of the following symptoms you should contact the 24/7 Advice Nurse at (510) 643-7197 or go to the Tang Center's Urgent Care. If the Tang Center is closed, see our [after-hours care webpage](#) or go to an outside urgent care or emergency room for further evaluation.
 - Shortness of breath
 - New fevers that are ≥ 101 F for more than 48 hours
 - A new rash that accompanies cold symptoms or fevers
 - A worsening headache
 - A worsening cough beyond 3 days of your illness
 - Severe abdominal pain
 - You feel you might faint
 - A worsening sore throat where your self-ordered COVID and strep throat tests are negative
 - New or worsening: Difficulty swallowing (beyond a sore throat), Nausea and vomiting, Chest pain, Earache, Sinus pain, Eye pain

For additional questions or concerns you can contact:

- Advice Nurse at (510) 643-7197 (available 24/7) or send a secure message via eTang.
- After hours, SHIP members can call the 24/7 SHIP Nurseline at (800) 681-4065.

For life or limb threatening emergencies, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.