

THE COMMON COLD - And What You Can Do About It!

The common cold is caused by any one of over 200 different types of "cold" viruses. It is not unusual for a college student to have 3-4 colds per year. Symptoms include runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, sore or scratchy throat, and sometimes a cough. You may have a mild headache or feel fatigued. Colds are spread by direct contact with infected secretions, usually by hand-to-hand contact with an infected person and then touching your eyes or nose. Contact may also occur after touching a hard surface that has recently (within 1-3 hours) been touched by a person with a cold. Thorough hand washing and not touching your face can reduce your chances of catching a cold.

Taking care of yourself

There is no medicine that will cure the flu or a cold. Antibiotics won't work - they combat bacterial, not viral, infections. Viruses actually hide inside your own cells where antibiotics cannot affect them. Cold care suggestions are, therefore, aimed at symptom relief and immune system support. These include the following:

- Get plenty of rest
- Don't smoke
- Drink plenty of fluids - but avoid milk and dairy products
- For fever, body aches, headache, or sore throat pain, take Tylenol or Ibuprofen every 4-6 hours
- For sore throat, gargle every 4 hours with warm, salty water (mix 1/2 teaspoon of salt or baking soda in 8 ounces of warm water). Also try using anesthetic throat lozenges.
- For hoarseness or laryngitis, talk as little as possible. Straining the voice can prolong or worsen laryngitis.
- Antihistamines and decongestants can be used. Use a decongestant such as Sudafed for nasal or sinus congestion or ear fullness. Mild antihistamines such as Chlor-Trimeton are useful for runny nose, sneezing and watery eyes. A combination antihistamine/decongestant such as Actifed or Drixoral may be taken for a combination of these symptoms. Remember, antihistamines may make you drowsy but decongestants usually don't.
- Cough preparations containing dextromethorphan, such as Robitussin DM or Benylin DM, may be helpful.

When you should seek medical care

Colds may lead to secondary bacterial infections or worsening of chronic conditions such as asthma, for which prescription medication would be necessary. You should

seek medical attention if you are not improving after 7-10 days, or for any of the following symptoms:

- Very sore throat that does not improve after 3 days, or that is accompanied by fever and without any other usual cold symptoms
- Painful swelling of the lymph nodes or glands of the neck
- Discolored mucus from nasal passages
- Pain or tenderness around the eyes
- Ear pain (as opposed to a full feeling)
- Cough with production of a large amount of discolored mucus
- Painful breathing, wheezing or shortness of breath
- Cough that persists more than 2-3 weeks
- Severe headaches
- Fever greater than 100.5 degrees for more than 3-4 days

Remember to visit the Student Health Pharmacy for over-the-counter cold remedies!