

Colds & How to Deal with Them

Colds and influenza are not the same. A *cold* is a minor viral upper respiratory infection that is easily transmitted from person to person. Influenza or the “flu” is also an easily transmitted viral respiratory illness, but is more severe, with higher fevers, sudden onset, and more intense cough, body aches, and fatigue. There is an annual vaccine for most flu viruses but not for colds. Hundreds of different viruses can cause a *cold*. Immunity against one does not protect against another, so you can catch a series of colds, one right after the other, each caused by a different “cold” virus.

Cold Symptoms:

People with a cold often notice a sore throat, stuffy nose, hoarseness, cough, and an achy "run down" feeling for about 7 - 10 days. Although its victims may feel “feverish” their temperature is typically below 101 degrees. Cold and nasal allergy symptoms have similarities, but allergies are more likely than colds to be accompanied by itchy, watery eyes, or sneezing and to occur seasonally or upon exposure to an allergen.

Self-Care for Colds:

Colds are self-limiting, and usually go away without medical attention. Treatment is aimed at minimizing the discomfort of nasal congestion, cough, or other symptoms. Cough medicines don't shorten the duration of a cold, and sometimes they don't even help control the symptoms. Thus the old saying, “The best way to treat a cold is with contempt.” Ultimately your body's immune system must fight off the cold virus, so your best bet in preventing or dealing with a cold is to do things that help your body's immune and respiratory systems function at their best.

This includes regular and sufficient sleep, good nutrition, and avoiding smoking, secondhand smoke, excess alcohol, etc. Wash your hands regularly and don't rub your eyes and nose. These will also minimize your risk of coming down with other infectious illnesses such as flu, skin infections, and even meningitis.

Antibiotics don't help get rid of colds or the viruses that cause them. Antibiotics only fight bacterial infections—not viruses, and should be considered only if a secondary bacterial infection develops as a complication. Unnecessary use of antibiotics is dangerous and may render antibiotics less effective for future use.

Is it "Just a Cold"? Self-care is all that is needed for most colds, but sometimes medical attention is advised to rule out or treat complications or other conditions that may have initially masqueraded as a cold. Call for an appointment at the **Student Health Center at 664-2921** if you have:

Fever over 101.6; severe headache, fatigue, muscle aches, or wheezing; shortness of breath; chest pain; coughing up brown, green or bloody mucus; blotchy diffuse rash; stiff neck; enlarged coated tonsils; persistent swollen lymph node(s); difficulty opening mouth or swallowing; confusion; persistent dizziness or other severe symptoms; or known exposure to some other infectious illness (meningitis, strep throat, influenza, etc.).

Preventing Colds:

Since cold viruses are most infectious before a person is aware of symptoms, it's possible to catch a cold, from someone who seems perfectly well. Therefore, focus on preventing exposure all the time: Wash your hands frequently or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer, as hands are notorious spreaders of viruses and bacteria. Cover coughs and sneezes. Avoid sharing eating utensils, beverages, etc. with others – and try to keep your body's natural immune and respiratory system defenses in top shape.