

## COLDS ARE NOT FLU

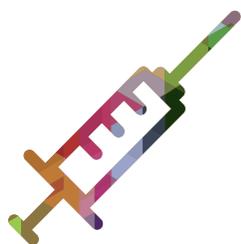
### Influenza (or flu) is a serious illness.

A 'cold' is often called the 'flu', but they are different infections. Flu symptoms usually start suddenly with a high fever and you may feel unwell enough to need rest. Symptoms can also include irritation in the throat or lungs, a dry cough, shivering, sweating and severe muscle aches.

### The flu tends to make the whole body ache, whereas colds usually affect the nose and throat only.

The influenza vaccine is recommended in autumn for people who are at risk of serious complications. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information about vaccination for you and your family, or visit [www.nps.org.au/vaccines](http://www.nps.org.au/vaccines)

### Having the influenza vaccine will not prevent you from getting colds, as colds are caused by different viruses.



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# COLDS, COUGHS AND FLU: WHAT YOU CAN DO



Manage your cold and flu without antibiotics  
- join the fight against **antibiotic resistance**

## WHAT ARE COLDS?

Colds are infections of the respiratory tract. Symptoms can include sneezing, a blocked or runny nose, a sore throat and coughing.

### Colds are common and affect many people every year. In fact:

- ▶ children can get 5-10 colds per year
- ▶ children get more colds than adults because they do not have the same immunity to viruses as adults
- ▶ more than 200 different viruses can cause colds.

Colds rarely cause serious harm, but they can still make you feel unwell. The good news is that colds **usually get better in 7-10 days**, although a cough can last up to 3 weeks.



## Think you need antibiotics? Think again

Colds, flu and most coughs are caused by viruses. Antibiotics only work on infections caused by bacteria, NOT those caused by viruses. Your immune system can fight these viruses without antibiotics.

Antibiotics can cause side effects like stomach upsets, diarrhoea, thrush and allergic reactions, and:

- ▶ won't help a cold or viral infection get better faster
- ▶ won't stop a cold or viral infection from getting worse
- ▶ won't stop a cold or viral infection spreading to other people.



## Join the fight against antibiotic resistance

Using antibiotics when you **don't** need to could make them less effective when you **do** need to. This is called antibiotic resistance. When bacteria become antibiotic resistant, the antibiotic will no longer work for that infection. Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be difficult to treat, last for a long time and spread to other people.

According to the World Health Organization, antibiotic resistance is the third biggest threat to human health.

## Some special cases

Some ear and throat infections are caused by bacteria, but most will get better without antibiotics. Complications from these infections are rare for most people. You should discuss ways to relieve your symptoms with your pharmacist or doctor.

Certain people are more likely to develop complications from respiratory tract infections. Complications are often bacterial infections that need antibiotics. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to develop complications like pneumonia or hearing loss. People with chronic conditions (such as asthma, diabetes or immune problems) are also more likely to need an antibiotic to treat respiratory tract infections.

## How are coughs and colds spread?

Colds are usually passed from person to person by touching hands or objects (e.g. tissues and toys), or by breathing in droplets from sneezes and coughs. So when you go back to work or your child goes back to childcare, preschool or school, it's important to know how to prevent the spread to others.

To help prevent the spread of colds:

- ▶ cover your mouth when sneezing or coughing
- ▶ keep hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth
- ▶ use tissues to blow your nose, and throw them away after use
- ▶ wash your hands with soap, particularly before preparing, touching or eating food and after blowing your nose
- ▶ avoid sharing cups, glasses and cutlery.

## Relieve the symptoms

- ▶ Rest may help to fight the virus and help you or your child feel better.
- ▶ Drink something soothing. Encourage children to drink their usual amount of fluids.
- ▶ Avoid exposure to cigarette smoke.

Some medicines can relieve the symptoms of a cold. **Always ask your pharmacist or doctor for advice** on the most appropriate medicine for you or your child and **always read the label**.

Over-the-counter medicines for colds, coughs or flu can cause serious side effects. Some people may not be able to use certain medicines, including:

- ▶ people with particular medical conditions or taking certain medicines
- ▶ children and older people
- ▶ women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Few clinical trials have proven the effectiveness of various 'cough and cold' and 'cold and flu' medicines, particularly for children.

## Relieve blocked sinuses, clear mucus or dry a runny nose

- ▶ Saline (salt water) sprays or drops can help clear mucus.
- ▶ Inhale steam from a running shower. **Do not** sit children over a steam bowl as hot water can burn the lining of a child's nose, and the water can spill.
- ▶ Decongestant tablets, mixtures, sprays or drops help some adults relieve blocked sinuses.
- ▶ Use an ointment to soothe dry or chapped skin around your nose.

## Soothe a sore throat or cough

- ▶ Gargle warm salty water.
- ▶ Suck on ice or a throat lozenge.
- ▶ Common pain relief medicines like paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin can ease the pain of a sore throat. **Aspirin is not suitable for children and some adults.**



## There is little information to support that vitamin or mineral supplements, herbal and natural medicines can help prevent or treat colds.

As with all medicines, supplements and herbal and natural medicines can cause side effects and may negatively interact with other medicines. Their benefits and risks may not have been tested adequately. This is particularly the case for use in children.

**Vitamin C supplements** have not been shown to prevent or to reliably treat colds.

**Zinc** might shorten the length of a cold for some people or reduce the severity of their symptoms. But it can also cause side effects such as nausea and a bad taste in the mouth.

**Echinacea medicines** differ greatly and most have not been tested in quality clinical trials. It is not known if echinacea will prevent or treat a cold.

## See your doctor if it gets worse

Colds may make ongoing medical conditions worse (e.g. asthma or diabetes). See your doctor if this situation relates to you.

Some serious illnesses may initially seem like cold or flu symptoms but may require urgent medical attention. See a doctor if your symptoms appear suddenly, are severe or last longer than usual.

### See your doctor if you or your child develops any of the following:

> **38.5°**

- ▶ temperature higher than 38.5°C, or chills
- ▶ shortness of breath, noisy or fast breathing
- ▶ neck stiffness
- ▶ severe headache
- ▶ light hurting the eyes
- ▶ chest pain
- ▶ difficulty waking up or unusual drowsiness
- ▶ a skin rash
- ▶ vomiting
- ▶ persistent cough
- ▶ aching muscles

### OR if your child or baby has any of the following:

- ▶ bulging of the fontanelle (the soft spot on top of a baby's head)
- ▶ a high temperature (in babies under 6 months of age)
- ▶ excessive irritability
- ▶ a strange, high-pitched cry
- ▶ lack of energy
- ▶ loss of appetite/ not drinking/ feeding poorly
- ▶ earache

Your doctor can check the severity of the illness, tell you how long it should last, give advice on treatment and provide a medical certificate if needed.