

# COMMON COLD (nasopharyngitis)

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

7.4

### DESCRIPTION

A contagious viral infection of the upper-respiratory passages including the nose, throat, sinuses, ears, eustachian tubes, trachea, larynx, and bronchial tubes.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Runny or stuffy nose. Nasal discharge is watery at first, then becomes thick and yellow.
- Sore throat.
- Hoarseness.
- Cough that produces little or no sputum.
- Low fever.
- Fatigue.
- Watering eyes.
- Appetite loss.

### CAUSES

Any of at least 100 viruses. Virus particles spread through the air or from person-to-person contact, especially handshaking.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Winter (colds are most frequent in cold weather).
- Children attending school, day care.
- Household member who has cold.
- Crowded or unsanitary living conditions.
- Infection may be facilitated by stress, fatigue or allergic disorders.
- Smoking

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

To prevent spreading a cold to others, avoid unnecessary contact during the contagious phase (first two to four days). Wash hands frequently, especially after blowing your nose or before handling food. Avoid crowded places when possible, especially during the winter. Eat well-balanced, healthy diet that includes plenty of citrus fruits and other sources of vitamin C. Get adequate rest. Avoid second-hand smoke.

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

Spontaneous recovery in seven to fourteen days. Medications do not shorten recovery time.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Bacterial infections of the ears, throat, sinuses or lungs.

### GENERAL MEASURES

To relieve nasal congestion, use saline nasal spray. Use a cool-mist, humidifier to increase air moisture. Clean humidifier daily. If not available, put basin of water in room.

### MEDICATION

No medicine, including antibiotics, can cure the common cold. To relieve symptoms, you may use non-prescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, decongestants, nose drops or sprays, cough remedies and throat lozenges. Avoid alcohol, including cold medications containing alcohol, while taking acetaminophen. Decongestant nasal spray should be used no longer than indicated in package directions.

### ACTIVITY & DIET

Bed rest is not necessary, but avoid vigorous activity. Rest often. Do not exercise if your temperature is 101° or greater. Increase fluids. Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Any type and amount of solid food is acceptable as long as it can be swallowed without too much pain.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF..

- Increased throat pain, or white or yellow spots on the tonsils or other parts of the throat.
- Coughing episodes that are occurring more and more frequently; cough that produces thick, yellow-green or gray sputum; cough that lasts longer than ten days; or difficult or labored breathing between coughing bouts.
- Fever that last several days or fever over 101°F (38.3°C).
- Shaking, chills, chest pain or shortness of breath.
- Earache or headache.
- Skin rash; dusky blue or gray lips, skin or nail beds.
- Pain in the teeth or over the sinuses.
- Unusual lethargy or irritability.
- Enlarged, tender glands in the neck.
- Delirium.

Student Health Center



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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.