

# Cough, Congestion and Common Cold

## Do I need an appointment?

Most people who have a cough, cold or congestion **do not** need a medical appointment.

Usually, a cold gets better on its own and does not need treatment. Because colds are usually caused by viruses, **antibiotics do not help**.

## What are the symptoms of a cold?

- Sneezing, Coughing, Sniffing and runny nose, Sore throat, Chest congestion
- In children, a cold can also cause a fever.
- Colds usually last about 3 to 7 days in adults and 10 days in children. But some people have symptoms for up to 2 weeks.

## How can I tell if I have a cold or something else?

Sometimes, it can be hard to tell if you have a cold or something else. Some cold symptoms can also be caused by other illnesses, such as COVID-19, the flu, or strep throat.

There might be clues that can help you tell the difference:

- Most often these symptoms are caused by common cold viruses and get better on their own
- The flu virus is more likely to cause fever, body aches, and extreme tiredness than a cold.
- Strep throat usually causes severe throat pain. It can also cause a fever and swollen glands in the neck. People with strep throat usually do not have other cold symptoms like a stuffy nose or cough.

## When to Call the WCFHT

Most people with coughs, congestion and colds recover without medical care. However, if you or a person you care for have any of the following signs or symptoms, call us for advice.



- Have a persistent fever higher than 100.4°F (38°C) as well as trouble breathing
- Have a very bad sore throat
- Have a fever as well as lung disease, such as emphysema, asthma or COPD
- Have a cough that lasts longer than 10 days or starts getting worse
- Have chest pain when you cough or breathe deeply, have trouble breathing, or cough up blood
- If you are pregnant or older than 65 years, or if you have any chronic medical condition such as diabetes, call the clinic any time you get a long-lasting cough.

For Children:

- Is younger than 4 months
- Has a very bad sore throat
- Refuses to drink anything for a long time
- Has a fever, and is not acting like themselves
- Loses their sense of taste or smell, or won't eat foods they ate before
- Has a cough that lasts longer than 2 weeks, and is not getting any better or is getting worse
- Has a stuffed or runny nose that gets worse or does not get any better after 10 days
- Has red eyes, or yellow goop coming out of their eyes
- Has ear pain, pulls at their ears, or shows other signs of having an ear infection

Go to the Emergency Department (or call 911) if you or your child:

- Becomes confused or stops responding to you
- Has trouble breathing or has to work hard to breathe

### **What can I do to feel better?**

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink lots of fluids (water, juice, or broth) to stay hydrated. This helps replace any fluids lost if you have a runny nose or sweating from a fever. Warm tea or soup can help soothe a sore throat.
- Use a cool mist humidifier to add moisture to the air, if it helps.
- Use saline nose drops or spray to relieve stuffiness.
- Avoid smoking, and stay away from places where people are smoking

### **Can medicine help with a cold?**

- If you are a teen or an adult, you can try cough and cold medicines that you can get without a prescription ("over-the-counter"). These medicines might help with your symptoms. But they do not cure the cold or help you get well faster. If you try non-prescription cold medicines:
- Read the directions on the label, and follow them carefully. Do not combine 2 or more medicines that have acetaminophen in them. If you take too much acetaminophen, it can damage your liver.
- If you have a heart condition, have high blood pressure, or take any prescription medicines, talk to your pharmacist before taking cold medicine.
- Try nasal decongestant spray if you are congested (no longer than 5 days). After each use, lie down on your back and hang your head backward over the end of your couch or bed, turning your head side to side while sniffing, to distribute the decongestant. DO NOT use decongestant if you have heart disease or high blood pressure

### **For Children:**

- If your child is younger than 6 years, do not give them any cold medicines. These are not safe for young children. Even if your child is older than 6, cough and cold medicines probably will not help.
- Never give aspirin to any child younger than 18 years old. In children, aspirin can cause a life-threatening condition called Reye syndrome.
- When giving your child acetaminophen or other non-prescription medicines, never give more than the recommended dose.

### **How can I try to avoid getting a cold?**

There are some things you can do to keep germs from spreading:

- Wash your hands with soap and water often
- Cover your cough – Cough into your elbow instead of your hands. Teach children to do this, too. Throw away used tissues right away.
- Clean surfaces – The germs that cause colds can live on tables, door handles, and other surfaces for at least 2 hours.
- Stay home if you are sick – When you do need to be around other people, consider wearing a face mask until you are feeling better.

### **If you do make an appointment to be seen by a Health Care Provider in office please ensure you:**

- Wear a mask, which we ask you to wear for the duration of your time in the office.
- Depending on your symptoms they may direct you to be seated in our isolation room where the provider will conduct your visit.
- Use hand sanitizer to sanitize hands throughout your visit. Hand sanitizer pumps are found throughout the office for patient use.
- Distance yourself from other patients in the waiting room as much as possible.