

“Do I need to be seen today?”

Let's Talk About...

Upper Respiratory Infection (aka “The Common Cold”)

What is an Upper Respiratory Infection?

An upper respiratory infection (in other words, a common cold) is a viral infection caused by any one of a large number of viruses. Symptoms commonly include stuffy and runny nose, sneezing, sore throat and coughing. Low grade fever and mild headache are not uncommon. It typically resolves within a few days.

How does it spread?

You can become infected by breathing droplets produced by an infected person's sneeze or cough, or by touching a contaminated surface (e.g. door knobs, railings, countertops) or through direct contact with an infected person, and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Should I be seen in the office?

Most people with an upper respiratory infection don't benefit from an office visit but are potentially infectious and dangerous to vulnerable staff and other patients. Like most viral infections, upper respiratory infections do not respond to antibiotics.

Note: Sinus congestion does not require a visit. Most sinus infections are also viral and do not respond to antibiotics. If you are concerned you have a sinus infection, See the section “When to call the WCFHT” in the [Sinusitis](#) series on our website to determine whether you should seek medical care.

How is it different from the flu?

Both the flu and common cold are respiratory illnesses that present with similar symptoms and can often be difficult to tell apart. In general, the flu is worse than a cold, can occasionally result in serious complications and can include: fever or feverish/chills, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue.

If you are concerned you may have the flu, see the section “When to call the WCFHT” in the [Influenza](#) series on our website to determine whether you should seek medical care.

Please consider the following information before booking an appointment.

What should I do if I get sick?

- Stay home and rest. The majority of adults will recover within 3-7 days, 10 days in children
- Cough into your elbow or a Kleenex to avoid spreading viruses
- Wash your hands frequently or use an alcohol gel when soap and water is not available
- Consider wearing a mask if you do need to leave the house as you risk exposing other people to your illness.

What can I do to feel better?

The majority of people will recover at home without any medical treatment. The following therapies may be used for symptoms:

West Carleton

Family Health Team

- Gargle with a warm saline solution (1/4 tsp salt per 7-8 oz warm tap water) – Avoid mouthwash
- Take frequent sips of fluid
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen (such as Tylenol or Motrin) as needed to relieve discomfort from headache, ear pain, joint pain.
- Nasal decongestant spray if 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.

- For cough, honey and/or dextromethorphan may provide symptom relief

Note: Honey should not be used for infants younger than 1 year of age; over the counter cough and cold remedies should not be used in children younger than 6

- Consider using a cool mist nebulizer/vaporizer, especially at night. Add water only.

How can I protect myself and others?



Frequent hand washing can help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, especially from young children. Some cold viruses remain alive on the skin and smooth surfaces for at least two hours. Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue.

When to call the WCFHT



- Patient is younger than 4 months
- Fever above 100.4° F (38° C) that is accompanied with shaking chills and loss of appetite
- Coughing up blood
- Trouble Breathing
- Illness lasting more than 7 days
- Severe sore throat or if you have trouble swallowing
- Presence of chronic lung disease (like asthma, emphysema or COPD) with worsening symptoms

In Children:

Take your child to the emergency room if he or she:

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

If you do make an appointment...

- Wear a mask while visiting the office with an acute respiratory problem making sure it covers the nose and mouth – (provided at entrance to waiting room)
- Use alcohol gel to clean hands (provided at entrance)
- Sit at least one meter away from others (if negative pressure room is occupied)
- Otherwise, inform the receptionist that you are here and that you intend to enter the isolation room.



Note: If you have a history of **asthma**, you might experience a prolonged cough after a cold. Use of an inhaled steroid for several days is usually effective. If you do not have one on hand, you'll need to be assessed at the office before one can be prescribed for the first time.