



## **Dartmouth College Health Service**

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### **Cold and Flu symptoms and treatment**

The common cold is one of 200 viruses. The symptoms of a cold may include: runny nose, red eyes, sneezing, sore throat, dry cough, headache and general body aches. There is a gradual 1- or 2-day onset. As the cold progresses, the nasal mucus may thicken. This is the stage just before the cold dries up. A cold usually lasts 1-2 weeks but can often last up to 3 weeks.

Colds occur throughout the year. Antibiotics are not indicated for colds since antibiotics cannot kill viruses. There is no cure for the common cold. If you catch a cold, treat the symptoms and take care of yourself.

#### **Treatment:**

- \* Get extra rest. Slow down just a little from your routine. It isn't necessary to stay home in bed.
- \* It's important to stay well hydrated -- drink plenty of liquids. Hot water, tea, chicken soup will help relieve congestion and ease a dry or sore throat. Eat light, easily digested foods.
- \* Cough drops can soothe an irritated throat. Expensive, medicine-flavored cough drops are not any better than inexpensive, candy-flavored ones or hard candy.
- \* For a sore throat or postnasal drip, gargle with 1 teaspoon of salt mixed with 8 ounces of hot water, several times a day.
- \* Take ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) according to package directions to relieve aches and pains. Read labels carefully on combination products, as they may already contain ibuprofen and/or acetaminophen.
- \* Be alert to multi-symptom cold medications as they often contain acetaminophen or other active ingredients which may result in duplicating medication and unpleasant side effects.
- \* Take hot showers to relieve nasal stuffiness and ease body aches.

#### **When to call a Health Care Professional:**

The following signs may be an indication of a developing bacterial infection:

Fever and chills

Labored, shallow, rapid breathing with shortness of breath

Sinus or jaw pain, neck stiffness, severe headache

Cough that lingers for more than 7 – 10 days after other symptoms have cleared, particularly if it produces mucus. (It can be normal for a dry, hacking cough to last several weeks after a cold.)

### **Sore Throat and Strep Throat:**

Most sore throats are caused by viruses and may occur with a cold or may follow a cold.

Strep throat is a sore throat caused by a bacterial infection. Strep throat is most common in children from 3 – 15 years of age.

In general, the more cold-like your symptoms are, the less likely it is that you have strep throat.

#### **Symptoms of strep throat:**

- Severe and sudden onset sore throat
- Fever
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- White or yellow coating (spots) on the tonsils

### **Coughs:**

Coughing is the body's way of removing mucus from the lungs.

**Productive coughs** produce mucus that comes up from the lungs. This kind of cough generally should not be suppressed. It is needed to clear mucus from the lungs.

**Non-Productive coughs** are dry coughs that do not produce mucus. A dry, hacking cough may develop toward the end of a cold. Dry coughs that follow a cold may last up to several weeks and often get worse at night.

Over-the-counter cough syrups may help. Do not take anyone else's prescription cough medicine.

Seek medical attention if you develop difficulty breathing or chest discomfort in association with your cough.

### **Fever:**

A fever is a high body temperature. It is a symptom, not a disease. A fever is one way your body fights illness. If you think you have a fever measure your temperature with a thermometer. These are available in the vending pharmacy.

- Hydrate well! You are drinking enough if you are urinating more often than usual.
- Monitor your temperature.
- Take ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) according to the package directions. We typically recommend ibuprofen 400 – 600 mg every 6 hours (maximum dose 2400 mg in 24 hours) or acetaminophen 650 mg every 4 to 6 hours.
- Eat light, easily digested foods.

### **Influenza (Flu):**

Influenza, or flu, is a viral illness that commonly occurs in the winter. Flu is not the same as the common cold – the symptoms of flu are usually more severe and come on quite suddenly. Symptoms may include fever (101 – 104 degrees), shaking chills, body aches, muscle pain, headache, pain when you move your eyes, fatigue, weakness and runny nose. Symptoms may last up to 10 days. Although a normally healthy person with the flu feels very sick, the illness seldom leads

