

Common Cold

Also called: Coryza

The common cold is a viral infection of your upper respiratory tract — your nose and throat. A common cold is usually harmless, although it may not feel that way. If it's not a runny nose, sore throat and cough, it's the watery eyes, sneezing and congestion — or maybe all of the above. In fact, because any one of more than 200 viruses can cause a common cold, symptoms tend to vary greatly.

Most adults are likely to have a common cold two to four times a year. Children, especially preschoolers, may have a common cold as many as six to 10 times annually. Most people recover from a common cold in about a week or two. If symptoms don't improve, see your doctor.

Symptoms of a common cold usually appear about one to three days after exposure to a cold virus. Signs and symptoms of a common cold may include:

- Runny or stuffy nose
- Itchy or sore throat
- Cough
- Congestion
- Slight body aches or a mild headache
- Sneezing
- Watery eyes
- Low-grade fever (up to 102 F, or 39 C)
- Mild fatigue

The discharge from your nose may become thicker and yellow or green in color as a common cold runs its course. What makes a cold different from other viral infections is that you generally won't have a high fever. You're also unlikely to experience significant fatigue from a common cold.

Pneumonia

Also called: Bronchopneumonia

Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lung, usually caused by an infection. Three common causes are bacteria, viruses and fungi. You can also get pneumonia by accidentally inhaling a liquid or chemical. People most at risk are older than 65 or younger than 2 years of age, or already have health problems.

If you have pneumonia, you may have difficulty breathing and have a cough and a fever. A physical exam and history can help determine if you have pneumonia. Chest x-rays and blood tests can help determine what is wrong. Treatment depends on what made you sick. If bacteria are the cause, antibiotics should help. Viral pneumonia may get better with rest and drinking liquids.

Preventing pneumonia is always better than treating it. The best preventive measures include washing your hands frequently, not smoking, and wearing a mask when cleaning dusty or moldy areas. There is a vaccine for pneumococcal pneumonia, a bacterial infection which accounts for up to a quarter of all pneumonias.

Asthma

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects your airways. Your airways are tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs. If you have asthma, the inside walls of your airways become sore and swollen. That makes them very sensitive, and they may react strongly to things that you are allergic to or find irritating. When your airways react, they get narrower and your lungs get less air. This can cause wheezing, coughing, chest tightness and trouble breathing, especially early in the morning or at night.

When your asthma symptoms become worse than usual, it's called an asthma attack. In a severe asthma attack, the airways can close so much that your vital organs do not get enough oxygen. People can die from severe asthma attacks.

Asthma is treated with two kinds of medicines: quick-relief medicines to stop asthma symptoms and long-term control medicines to prevent symptoms.

Bronchitis

Bronchitis is an inflammation of the main air passages (bronchi) to your lungs. It causes a cough, shortness of breath and chest tightness. Coughing often brings up yellow or greenish mucus. There are two main types of bronchitis: acute and chronic.

Acute bronchitis is often caused by the same viruses that cause colds. It usually starts as a sore throat, runny nose or sinus infection, then spreads to your airways. It can cause a lingering dry cough, but it usually goes away on its own.

Chronic bronchitis is one type of COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease). The inflamed bronchi produce a lot of mucus. This leads to cough and difficulty getting air in and out of the lungs. Cigarette smoking is the most common cause. Breathing in other fumes and dusts over a long period of time may also cause chronic bronchitis. Treatment will help your symptoms, but chronic bronchitis is a long-term condition that keeps coming back or never goes away completely.

Emphysema

Emphysema is a type of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) involving damage to the air sacs (alveoli) in the lungs. As a result, your body does not get the oxygen it needs. Emphysema makes it hard to catch your breath. You may also have a chronic cough and have trouble breathing during exercise.

The most common cause is cigarette smoking. If you smoke, quitting can help prevent you from getting the disease. If you already have emphysema, not smoking might keep it from getting worse. Treatment is based on whether your symptoms are mild, moderate or severe. Treatments include inhalers, oxygen, medications and sometimes surgery to relieve symptoms and prevent complications.

Lung Cancer

Also called: Bronchogenic carcinoma

Lung cancer is one of the most common cancers in the world. It is a leading cause of cancer death in men and women in the United States. Cigarette smoking causes most lung cancers. The more cigarettes you smoke per day and the earlier you started smoking, the greater your risk of lung cancer. High levels of pollution, radiation and asbestos exposure may also increase risk.

Common symptoms of lung cancer include

- A cough that doesn't go away and gets worse over time
- Constant chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Shortness of breath, wheezing, or hoarseness
- Repeated problems with pneumonia or bronchitis
- Swelling of the neck and face
- Loss of appetite or weight loss
- Fatigue

There are many types of lung cancer. Each type of lung cancer grows and spreads in different ways and is treated differently. Treatment also depends on the stage, or how advanced it is. Treatment may include chemotherapy, radiation and surgery.

Sinusitis

Sinusitis means your sinuses are infected or inflamed. Your sinuses are hollow air spaces within the bones surrounding the nose. They produce mucus, which drains into the nose. If your nose is swollen, this can block the sinuses and cause pain and infection.

Sinusitis can be acute, lasting for less than four weeks, or chronic, lasting much longer. Acute sinusitis often starts as a cold, which then turns into a bacterial infection. Allergies, pollutants, nasal problems and certain diseases can also cause sinusitis.

Symptoms of sinusitis can include fever, weakness, fatigue, cough and congestion. There may also be mucus drainage in the back of the throat, called postnasal drip. Treatments include antibiotics, decongestants and pain relievers. Using heat pads on the inflamed area, saline nasal sprays and vaporizers can also help.