

Common Cold **FACTSHEET**

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What is the Common Cold?

The common cold is an upper respiratory infection that can be caused by many types of viruses.

Who gets a Common Cold?

Anyone can get a common cold. Children under the age of five have the most colds. The incidence of the common cold gradually decreases with increasing age.

What are the symptoms of a Common Cold?

The symptoms of a common cold may include a “scratchy” sore throat, runny nose, watering eyes, sneezing, chills, low-grade fever, and an overall feeling of achiness.

How is the Common Cold spread?

The common cold is spread when a well person breathes in germs that an infected person has coughed or sneezed into the air. It can also be spread by hands, handkerchiefs, eating utensils, or other items freshly soiled by an infected person's respiratory secretions.

How soon do symptoms appear?

It usually takes between 12 hours and five days for symptoms to appear.

Is a person with a Common Cold contagious?

Yes, a person with a common cold is contagious 24 hours before the symptoms appear and for five days after the symptoms appear.

How is the Common Cold treated?

The common cold may be treated with over the counter cold medications. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist before using over the counter medication if you are taking other drugs. Antibiotics should not be used because they are ineffective against the cold viruses. You should also drink plenty of fluids and remain well rested.

How can the Common Cold be prevented?

The common cold can be prevented by:

- Frequent, thorough hand washing
- Coughing and sneezing into the inside of the elbow, not hand
- Proper disposal of any item soiled with respiratory secretions in trash cans
- Avoid crowding in childcare facilities, living and sleeping quarters whenever possible
- Provide adequate ventilation.

Want more information?

Additional information can be provided by your health care provider. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-9371.

