

Cold Information, Symptoms and Relief

More than 200 different viruses cause the common cold. You can "catch" a cold by touching a surface that has a cold virus on it and then touching your eyes or nose or by inhaling drops of mucus infected with a cold virus that are floating in the air. Cold viruses can live on surfaces, including your skin, for up to three hours.

Colds can be prevented by washing your hands frequently and not touching your face. If you have a cold you should stay away from other people and cover your nose or mouth when you sneeze or cough.

There is no cure for the common cold. Any medications you take only treat the symptoms and antibiotics don't do any good at all. In fact, antibiotics do harm because their overuse allows bacteria to develop immunity to them.

Cold symptoms usually last from 2 to 24 days but usually go away in about a week. Symptoms appear two to three days after contact with the virus and may include:

- Mucus buildup in your nose
- Difficulty breathing through your nose
- Swelling of your sinuses
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Headache
- Fever
- Watery eyes
- Sore throat

Children get the most colds--about 6 to 10 a year--because they have developed immunity to fewer viruses and because they come in close contact with other children who have colds.

You can relieve cold symptoms by resting in bed, drinking fluids, gargling with warm salt water, using throat sprays or lozenges, rubbing petroleum jelly on a raw nose, and taking acetaminophen. Consult your physician if you have high fever, swollen glands, severe sinus pain, severe sore throat or a cough that produces mucus.