

# The Common Cold in Adults

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you develop cold symptoms. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

## Could it be Coronavirus?

### A high temperature could be a symptom of coronavirus (Covid-19)

#### Main symptoms

The main symptoms of coronavirus are:

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature).
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Most people with coronavirus have at least 1 of these symptoms.

#### What to do if you have symptoms

If you have any of the main symptoms of coronavirus:

1. Get a test to check if you have coronavirus as soon as possible.
2. Stay at home and do not have visitors until you get your test result – only leave your home to have a test.

Visit NHS .UK:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

Here you will find the latest advice on symptoms, how to book a test and advice on when and how long you, your household and your 'bubble' need to isolate

## Useful facts

### What is the common cold?

Mild viral infections can cause symptoms of the cold, including a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, cough, a sore throat, a slightly raised body temperature (fever) up to 39°C and feeling generally unwell.

### How dangerous are colds?

Colds are harmless infections that in the vast majority of cases get better by themselves without any complications. If you have a long-term health problem (such as diabetes, heart disease or a lung condition) or a weakened immune system (for example due to chemotherapy) you may need to get advice from 111 or your GP.

### How common are they?

Colds are very common, and adults get an average of two to four colds a year.

### Are there any complications?

While the symptoms are unpleasant, the common cold is harmless. Complications, such as chest, ear and other infections, are rare.

### Will I need antibiotics?

Most colds get better on their own without treatment. Antibiotics are ineffective for treating the common cold and may cause side effects.

### Effect of smoking:

Cold symptoms such as coughing tend to be more severe if you smoke, and the infection usually lasts longer.

## What can I expect to happen?

**Catching a cold:** We can catch a cold by either breathing in droplets of fluid containing the cold virus (when someone sneezes), or by touching something that someone has sneezed on, and then touching our mouth or nose.

**Symptoms:** In adults and older children, cold symptoms last for about a week and a half, and in younger children for up to two weeks. Symptoms are usually worst in the first two to three days, before they gradually start to improve. Coughs may last up to three weeks.

**There is no cure:** We have no cure for the common cold. But while our bodies fight the infection, there are various ways of relieving our symptoms.

## What can I do to help myself- now and in the future?

**Simple measures:** Get some rest until you feel better – we usually know when we're well enough to return to normal activities.

**Diet and fluids:** Drink plenty of fluids to replace those lost from sweating and a runny nose. Try to eat healthily, including at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day if possible.

**Over the counter medicines:** Paracetamol, Ibuprofen or Aspirin can help reduce the symptoms of a cold. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions. Talk to your pharmacist about remedies that may help ease your symptoms.

## When should I seek medical help?

Most colds are not serious and get better by themselves. Contact 111 or your GP surgery for advice if you notice one or more of the following:

- You develop a high temperature (above 39°C or 102.2°F), or you feel shivery;
- You're feeling confused or disorientated;
- You notice a sharp pain in your chest;
- You cough up blood;
- You find it difficult to breathe;
- Your symptoms last longer than three weeks;
- Your symptoms suddenly get worse.

## Where can I find out more?

Visit NHS Choices (<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Cold-common/Pages/Introduction.aspx>) or Patient.co.uk <http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Common-Cold.htm> for more information on what you can do if you suffer from a cold. Remember that your pharmacist can also assist you in assessing your symptoms.