

Upper Respiratory Infections

An upper respiratory infection (URI) is an illness caused by an infection of the upper air passages from a virus or bacterial infection.

Causes & Symptoms

URI is caused by a virus or bacteria in the upper air passages. Viruses cause illnesses like the common cold and bacteria causes illnesses like strep throat. The virus or bacteria is usually spread by breathing air or touching something with virus or bacteria germs. Different viruses and bacteria take different lengths of time to make you feel sick and URIs can last 3-14 days. Symptoms can be:

- Congestion
- Cough
- Facial pain or pressure
- Fever
- Headache
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Sore throat

Treatment & Prevention

Antibiotics do work against bacteria and can be prescribed for bacterial infections. Antibiotics do not work against viruses and should not be used to treat viruses. Although antibiotics are not used to treat viruses, your health care provider may need to give you antibiotics to treat URI even if it was started by a virus.

DO

- Increase the humidity or moisture in your home using a humidifier or vaporizer
- If you cannot get a humidifier or vaporizer place a pan of water next to your heating vents and refill it daily
- Drink at least 8 large glasses of fluids a day (water, juices, and broths)
- Take all medications as ordered by your doctor
- Apply petroleum jelly (like Vaseline®) to your lips or around your nose to prevent chapping

- **Always wash your hands after using the toilet, putting a diaper on a child, wiping your nose, and before eating**
- **Use tissues rather than handkerchiefs**
- **Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces like counter tops, computer keyboards, and door handles**

DO NOT

- Give yourself or your child an enema or laxative to “workout the cold”
- Use leftover antibiotics or medicine prescribed for other people
- Use over-the-counter drugs on children under 6 months of age

When to Call your Doctor

- You or your child has a fever greater than 101°F that lasts three days or longer
- You or your child are having difficulty breathing
- Your or your child’s lips and skin are pale or take on a blue color

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