



Accomplished Health & Wellness

Patient Handout

Common Cold • Reviewed October 2026

WHAT IS A COMMON COLD?

A cold is a mild infection of the nose and throat caused by common respiratory viruses. Symptoms usually build up gradually and get better on their own. Most colds last about a week, but some symptoms (like cough) can last up to two weeks.



Common Symptoms

- Stuffy or runny nose
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Sneezing
- Mild headache or body aches Low-grade fever (more common in children)

Care at Home

- Rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) for fever, sore throat, or aches, as directed.
- Saline nasal sprays or rinses can ease congestion.
- Decongestants (alone or with an antihistamine) may help adults with a stuffy nose.
- Zinc, started within 24 hours of symptoms, may slightly shorten a cold in some people, but can cause nausea or a bad taste.
- Nasal steroid spray as directed

Good to Know

1. Antibiotics do not help. Colds are caused by viruses, so antibiotics will not make you better faster and can cause side effects. Thick or discolored nasal mucus is a normal part of a cold and is not a reason for antibiotics.
2. For children: honey (only if over 1 year old), saline nasal rinses, and plenty of fluids are helpful. Talk to your doctor first before giving over-the-counter cough and cold medicines to children under 4.
3. Schedule a visit or contact the clinic if symptoms worsen at any point or fail to improve in 10–14 days; you have a high fever (greater than 102), or a fever that returns after getting better.
4. Prevent spreading colds: wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer, cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow, and stay home when possible while you are sick.



COMPARE

Cold, Flu, or Allergies?

These illnesses share many symptoms. Here is how to distinguish the 3:

- Allergies do not cause fever.
- The flu tends to come on suddenly with a high fever and makes you feel worse all over.
- A cold worsens slowly with little to no fever.
- Use this guide to decide when to manage at home and when to schedule a visit.

Illness	Manage at home if	Schedule a visit if
Allergies	Itchy eyes, sneezing, clear drainage, no fever	Wheezing, or over-the-counter options are not helping
Common cold	Congestion, mild sore throat, improving in 7–10 days	Lasting past 10 days, or worsening after first improving
Flu	Fever and aches improving by day 3–4	Fever over 3 days, trouble breathing, or a high-risk condition

WHEN TO CONTACT US



- Symptoms that worsen or last longer than about 10–14 days
- High fever, or fever that returns after getting better
- Ear pain, face or sinus pain, or severe sore throat
- Shortness of breath or wheezing
- You have a chronic heart or lung condition, or a weakened immune system

Quick Reference

Book a visit	Email "Appointment Request".
Cancel or reschedule	Email at least 24 hours ahead.
Refill a current medication	Call your pharmacy.
Change or start a medication	Schedule a visit or televisit.
Non-urgent question	Email "Question".



In an Emergency

Do not email, call, or text the office. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

For a mental health crisis, call or text 988.