



August 2011

# Common Cold

## What is a Common Cold?

A common cold is a viral infection of the upper respiratory tract primarily caused by the rhinoviruses and coronaviruses. It is the most frequent infectious disease in humans with the average adult having two to four infections a year and the average child having six to 12 infections a year. Colds may occur throughout the year but peaks in spring and fall.

## Symptoms of a Common Cold

Symptoms usually begin two to five days after initial infection but occasionally may occur in as little as 10 hours. Symptoms peak two to three days after symptoms initially appear and may resolve in seven to 10 days, although in some cases, it can last for up to three weeks.

The first sign of an upper respiratory virus is often a sore or scratchy throat. Other common symptoms include:

- Cough
- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Headache
- Nasal congestion
- Low-grade fever

## How a Common Cold spreads

The virus is carried in saliva and nasal secretions. It spreads easily from person-to-person through the air by sneezing, coughing, direct or indirect contact with contaminated secretions that are on surfaces. The virus can live on objects for hours. To avoid spreading the illness to others:

- Wash hands frequently with plain soap and water
- Clean contaminated surfaces
- Dispose of used tissues properly
- Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing and wash hands afterwards
- Limit direct contact with others, especially those with a weak immune system
- Ensure good ventilation

For further information, please call:  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

## Treating a Common Cold

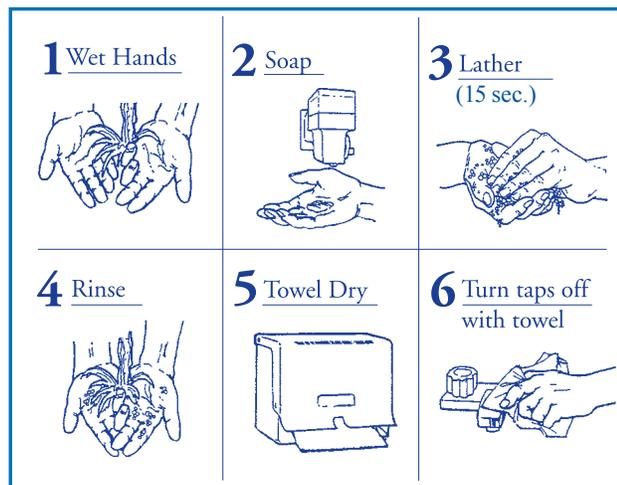
There is no treatment for the common cold. Treatment involves alleviating symptoms and allowing the illness to run its course. Supportive measures for the common cold include rest and drinking plenty of fluids.

See your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- Skin rash
- Rapid or difficult breathing
- Earache
- Persistent cough
- Fever higher than 39°C (102°F)
- Excessive sleepiness

## Preventing a Common Cold

There is no vaccine to prevent the common cold. The best prevention is frequent hand washing.



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