



Student Health Center

UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: COLD

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a common cold.

Colds are caused by tiny germs called viruses. The infection affects the upper breathing passages: the nose, sinuses, throat, ears, trachea (windpipe), and larynx (voicebox).

Fortunately, viral infections are generally less serious than bacterial infections.

Unfortunately, viral infections like colds can make you feel miserable, and few medicines are effective against viruses (most antibiotics work against bacteria). The *symptoms* of a cold can be treated, but the infection itself must be overcome by your body's defense mechanisms.

Symptoms of a cold include stuffy or runny nose, scratchy throat, watery and itchy eyes, dry cough, hoarseness, low fever, loss of appetite, mild headache, and fatigue (tired feeling). Nasal drainage ranges from clear & watery to thick & yellow. Which cold symptoms you have depends on which virus is causing the infection (more than a hundred viruses cause infections in humans). Body aches, high fever ($>103^{\circ}$), vomiting, and diarrhea are typical of the flu or other viral infections, not colds.

Cold symptoms typically last one to two weeks.

Telling the difference between a viral and bacterial infection is not 100%. Also, a cold can be followed by a more serious bacterial infection.

At present, you appear to have a non-serious cold. But, if your symptoms change or worsen, you should be checked again.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR COLD:

- 1- Rest as much as possible. Give your body time to recover.
- 2- Drink plenty of liquids. Any non-alcoholic drink is fine. Do not force solid food if your appetite is off.
- 3- Over-the-counter medicines can help treat specific symptoms. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen are effective for discomfort and fever. Decongestants (nasal spray or by mouth) can relieve excessive nasal drainage. Cough medicines containing dextromethorphan (DM) are helpful for cough.
- 4- Make a follow-up appointment as indicated. Your doctor can help you control symptoms and monitor your progress. If you develop sharp ear pain, fever over 101.5° , or cough producing foul sputum, make a prompt medical appointment.
- 5- If your symptoms or overall condition worsen significantly, seek medical care at once. Return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/ referral doctor without delay if you develop significant chest pain or shortness of breath.