

Common cold



The common cold may be caused by any one of over 100 known cold viruses.

Getting a cold has nothing to do with being cold or chilled and there is no scientific evidence that ‘feeding a cold’ (or ‘starving a fever’) makes any difference to how long it lasts.

How the common cold is spread

The common cold is spread when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes small droplets containing infectious agents into the air. The droplets in the air may be breathed in by those nearby. The common cold is also spread by indirect contact with hands, tissues or other articles soiled by nose and throat discharges.

Newborn babies are protected for about the first 6 months of life by antibodies from their mothers. After this, young children are very susceptible to colds because:

- > they haven't built up immunity,
- > they have close contact with adults and other children,
- > they cannot practice good personal hygiene, and,
- > they have tiny nose and ear passages which are easily blocked.

It is not abnormal for children to have five or more colds a year.

It is a myth that people get colds because of a weakened immune system. Healthy people with normal immune systems will almost always become infected if the virus enters their noses – however sometimes they may not develop any symptoms.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms include:

- > runny nose
- > sneezing
- > coughing
- > mild sore throat
- > watery eyes
- > feeling unwell.

Fever is very uncommon, especially in people over 3 years of age. Most people will recover within 10 days.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is made on the presenting signs and symptoms. Laboratory tests are not necessary.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

1 to 3 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

1 to 3 days.

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Treatment

There is no specific antiviral treatment for the viruses which cause colds. However, paracetamol and other medications available from pharmacies may provide relief of symptoms.

Do not give Aspirin to children under 12 years of age unless specifically recommended by a doctor.

Prevention

- > Exclusion from childcare, preschool, school or work is not necessary, but a person with a cold should stay home until he or she feels well.
- > [Wash hands](#) after contact with soiled tissues or with nose and throat discharges.
- > [Cover your mouth and nose](#) when sneezing or coughing.
- > Some viruses live for several days on surfaces (for example telephones, door handles, computer keyboards). Wipe down all frequently touched surfaces with a cloth dampened with detergent.

Useful links

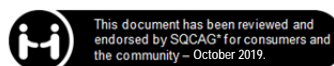
- > [Hand hygiene](#)
- > [Wash, wipe, cover...don't infect another!
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/WashWipeCover](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/WashWipeCover)

You've Got What? 5th Edition

Communicable Disease Control Branch
Telephone: 1300 232 272
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The SA Health Disclaimer for this resource is located at
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat

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*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group.



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