

# Upper Respiratory Illness

## What are the symptoms of an Upper Respiratory Illness?

The upper respiratory tract includes the sinuses, nasal passages, and throat. Upper respiratory infections are one of the most frequent causes of doctor's visits with varying symptoms ranging from runny nose, sore throat, cough, breathing difficulty, and extreme tiredness. Although upper respiratory infections can happen at any time, they are most common in the fall and winter months, from September until March. The majority of upper respiratory infections are due to transient viral infections of the upper respiratory tract, and **DON'T REQUIRE ANTIBIOTICS**.

Most often, upper respiratory infections are contagious and can spread from person to person by inhaling respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing. The transmission can also occur by touching the nose or mouth by hand or other object exposed to the virus.

Symptom	Cold	Flu
Fever	Rare, usually <101°	Characteristic 102-104 °F
Clear, runny nose	Yes	Can be present
Headache	Rare	Yes
General aches & pains	Slight	Usual; often severe
Fatigue, weakness	mild	Can last up to 2-3 weeks
Extreme exhaustion	Never	Early and prominent
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate	Common; often severe
Complications	<i>Sinus infection, ear infections (increase in symptoms after decrease in symptoms, usually after 2 weeks)</i>	<i>Bronchitis, pneumonia</i>

## What should I do if I think that I have a viral URI?

Get plenty of rest and drink plenty of fluids. Also consider one or more of the following medications, which are available without a prescription:

Symptom(s)	Over-the-Counter Medication
Fever and pain	Acetaminophen (Tylenol); Ibuprofen (advil- avoid with HTN); fluids
"Stuffy", clogged nose	Nasal rinse (Neil med), nasal saline, Flonase (fluticasone), decongestant (Sudafed - avoid with HTN); cool mist humidifier; fluids
Productive cough	Guaifenesin (robitussin, mucinex)- thin mucous to make it easier to expel
Suppressing cough	If necessary, dextromethorphan can be helpful (can interact with many medications, check with your doctor first)
Combination medications	Nyquil, Tylenol cold and sinus, etc.- these can be helpful, but read ingredients and assure it will not interact with other medications. Can be sedating, so use with caution.

## When should I seek treatment?

Viral infections can sometimes be associated with bacterial overgrowth & occasionally lead to a bacterial infection (bronchitis, ear infections, sinusitis), which typically requires antibiotic therapy. Viral URIs also may worsen asthma symptoms (wheezing) in patients with asthma; such symptoms also require further evaluation & treatment.

### Seek medical advice or treatment if:

- Symptoms are unchanged or worsening after 7-10 days
  - You experience shortness of breath or have any respiratory difficulty (especially with COPD or asthma)
  - You experience a high fever (> 101.5°F)
- You develop eye pain/ swelling and/or vision changes
  - You develop severe head or facial pain/swelling

## How can I prevent viral URI's?

Wash your hands frequently. Cold and flu viruses are spread by touching infected persons that have come in contact with the virus and then touching one's nose or mouth. Frequent hand washing is important to prevent this process. Inhalation of infected particles in the air also can spread colds/respiratory viral infections, so watch close contacts who are coughing or sneezing.