

UAB Health Education

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTION (URI)



Upper respiratory infection is a general term for any kind of infectious disease process involving the nasal passages, throat and lungs. This is usually caused by a viral infection, although rarely may be bacterial. It spreads by respiratory droplets from coughing/sneezing, skin-to-skin contact or by sharing common items. Symptoms typically last 7-14 days.

DIAGNOSIS

Based on symptoms and physical exam.

TREATMENT

- Rest, decrease activity, avoid over-exertion
- Increase fluid intake, avoid caffeine, milk, carbonated beverages
- Gargle salt water (1/4 tsp salt in 4-8 oz warm water)
- Elevate head during sleep to reduce congestion
- Use humidifier/vaporizer if possible
- Nasal, sinus irrigation
- Avoid smoking and second-hand smoke

Because most URIs are caused by viruses, antibiotics are not used. Over-the-counter medications will not shorten the course of illness, but may relieve symptoms:

CONGESTION	Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed), Phenylephrine, Saline Nasal Spray, Nasal Irrigation (Neti Pot), Nasal Steroids: Flucatisone (Flonase), Triamcinolone (Nasacort)
PAIN, HEADACHE, FEVER	Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
COUGH	Mucus-thinners (Mucinex), Decongestants (Sudafed), Cough suppressants (Robitussin)
SORE THROAT	Cough drops/throat lozenges

CALL STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES IF:

- Temperature greater than 100.4°F persists for more than 3-4 days
- Severe headache, blurred vision, increased facial swelling
- Skin rash, painful joints, persistent vomiting
- Chest pain, shortness of breath, difficulty swallowing saliva
- Persistent greenish nasal discharge more than 7-10 days with no improvement

RESOURCES

FamilyDoctor.org <https://familydoctor.org/condition/colds-and-the-flu/>

Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/common-cold/symptoms-causes/syc-20351605>

CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/community/for-patients/common-illnesses/index.html>

SYMPTOMS

- Sore throat
- Sneezing/coughing
- Congested, runny nose, post-nasal drip
- Swollen/painful tonsils or glands
- Watery eyes, ears popping, headache
- Low grade fevers (less than 101°F)/chills

RISK FACTORS

- Poor nutrition
- Lack of sleep
- Regular overuse of alcohol
- Dorm living (close quarters)
- Working with children
- Sedentary lifestyle

PREVENTION

- Eat healthy foods, exercise, get adequate sleep
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Wash hands frequently with soap, avoid touching eyes/mouth, cough/sneeze into your elbow
- Clean common surfaces such as counters and doorknobs with antibacterial disinfectant