

My nose is running

Doctor word: Rhinitis

What causes a runny nose? Cold viruses are the main cause of runny nose or “rhinitis”. It is a normal reaction of the body trying to wash out the infecting virus. The mucus can be white, yellow, or green as immune cells and sometimes bacteria get mixed into the mucus. Colored mucus does not mean you need antibiotics.

How do I get rid of the cold? Your body usually gets rid of colds on its own without difficulty. Kids can have 2-9 colds a year and adults usually have fewer. They can cause runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, cough and headaches. Colds can hang around up to a few weeks and lead to other conditions such as sinus, ear, throat and lung infections.

Do antibiotics help? NO. Colds are caused by viruses which are not killed by antibiotics. Antibiotics can create stronger germs or be harmful if taken when not needed. Other medications such as decongestants and antihistamines could be helpful to relieve some symptoms. Talk to your healthcare provider to see which ones are safest for you.

Colds do NOT get better quicker with antibiotics!!

What can I do to get better? Rest and drinking plenty of fluids is the best way to get better quickly. Other things that can help include using a humidifier, hot showers, or baths; acetaminophen or ibuprofen for headaches, muscle aches, or fevers; decongestants and antihistamines; and lotion for a raw, red nose.

Should I see a doctor? If you have high fever over 104°F, fever over 100°F for more than 3 days, or serious trouble breathing, you should consult your health care provider.

Can I prevent getting colds? YES. *Washing your hands* is the easiest way to prevent the spread of colds. Cold viruses like to infect you when your body’s immune system is weak. To keep your immune system healthy, eat right, exercise, get plenty of rest, stay hydrated and don’t smoke. Smoking around children can make them more likely to get colds and develop more serious problems such as asthma.



Infectious Disease Epidemiology

Adapted from Washington State Department of Health,
Louisiana Office of Public Health, and the CDC