



COLD AND FLU: CONSUMER FAQs

What are bacteria and viruses?

Bacteria are single-celled organisms usually found all over the inside and outside of our bodies, except in the blood and spinal fluid. Many bacteria are not harmful. In fact, some are actually beneficial. However, disease-causing bacteria trigger illnesses, such as strep throat and some ear infections. Viruses are even smaller than bacteria. A virus cannot survive outside the body's cells. It causes illnesses by invading healthy cells and reproducing.

What kinds of infections are caused by viruses and should not be treated with antibiotics?

- Colds
- Flu (protect yourself – get your flu shot)
- Most coughs and bronchitis
- Sore throats (except for those resulting from strep throat)

How do I know when an illness is caused by a viral or bacterial infection?

Sometimes it is very hard to tell. Consult with your doctor to be sure.

When do I need to take antibiotics?

Antibiotics are very powerful medications. They should only be used when prescribed by a doctor to treat bacterial infections.

Do I need an antibiotic when mucus from the nose changes to yellow or green?

Yellow or green mucus does not indicate a bacterial infection. It is normal for the mucus to get thick and change color during a viral cold.

Should I ask my doctor to prescribe antibiotics?

Talk to your doctor about the best treatment. You should not expect to get a prescription for antibiotics. If you have a viral infection, antibiotics will not cure it, help you feel better, or prevent someone else from getting your virus.

What is antibiotic resistance and why should I be concerned?

Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria change in a way that reduces or eliminates the effectiveness of antibiotics. These resistant bacteria survive and multiply — causing more harm, such as a longer illness, more doctor visits, and a need for more expensive and toxic antibiotics. Resistant bacteria may even cause death.



What can I do to avoid antibiotic-resistant infections?

- Start by talking with your health care provider about antibiotic resistance.
- Ask whether an antibiotic is likely to be effective in treating your illness.
- Do not demand an antibiotic when your health care provider determines one is not appropriate.

Ask what else you can do to help relieve your symptoms.

- Do not take an antibiotic for a viral infection like a cold, a cough or the flu.
- Take an antibiotic exactly as the doctor tells you. Do not skip doses. Complete the prescribed course of treatment, even if you are feeling better.
- Do not save any antibiotics for the next time you get sick. Discard any leftover medication once you have completed your prescribed course of treatment.
- Do not take antibiotics prescribed for someone else. The antibiotic may not be appropriate for your illness. Taking the wrong medicine may delay correct treatment and allow bacteria to multiply.

Become a *Partner in Prevention* – use antibiotics wisely.