

HEALTH FAX: Upper Respiratory Infections (URI) hfuri11/08

Upper respiratory infections or colds are caused by more than 200 different rhinoviruses.

Symptoms include: nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, fever, body aches, tiredness, ear fullness, and swollen glands. The common cold usually lasts 7 to 14 days.

What causes a sore throat? The vast majority of sore throats are caused by viral infections. The most common bacterial cause of sore throat is Streptococcus. A throat culture is used to determine if strep is present. **Health Services will call you within 48 hours if the culture is positive** to prescribe an antibiotic. A complete course of antibiotics is important to avoid complications of an untreated strep infection (i.e.: rheumatic fever, tonsillar abscess, or kidney infection). We will not call if the throat culture is negative.

Symptoms of a URI will resolve in 7 to 14 days. Most infections are viral, so antibiotics won't make you feel better faster. Some things you can do to support your body in the healing process :

- **Drink** at least 8 oz. (1 glass) of water, juice, soup, or tea each hour. This helps prevent dehydration. Do NOT drink alcohol. It contributes to dehydration and interacts with medications.
- **Get enough rest.** Your body needs to conserve energy to heal. Try going to bed early so you can keep up with your academic requirements. **If you miss a class it is your responsibility to communicate with your instructors. Excuse notes are not given to verify visits to Health Services.**
- **Inhale moist air**, use a saline nasal spray, take steamy showers or use a vaporizer. This helps to relieve congestion by loosening secretions. Humidifiers are available at the pharmacy.
- **Gargle frequently** to soothe a sore throat. Use approximately 1/4 tsp. salt in a glass of warm water. Gargling helps reduce swelling, relieves pain, and helps wash away secretions in the back of the throat. Hard candy, throat sprays or throat lozenges can also soothe a sore throat or cough.
- **Prevention: WASH YOUR HANDS** with warm water and soap or use alcohol-based sanitizers often. Eat well, get enough rest, exercise regularly, and manage stress to help your immune system.
- **Non-prescription** cold and cough medications and pain relievers do not shorten the duration of URIs but can decrease symptoms. If you are taking any other medications, it is a good idea to check with your health care provider or pharmacist before taking OTC (over-the-counter) medicines.

Decongestants relieve congestion without causing drowsiness. Decongestant nasal sprays (Afrin®) can be used, but for a maximum of 3 days.

Cough medicines (Robitussin DM, Mucinex DM) can diminish a cough and loosen phlegm.

A **pain reliever/fever reducer** (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) can make you more comfortable.

A drowsy cold medicine can help you sleep better at night.

Call us for an appointment at 315-443-9005 if:

- Your symptoms worsen after three to five days.
- New symptoms develop.
- Your symptoms do not resolve after 14 days.