

How can I manage

my common infection?

**A leaflet for adults aged 16 years and over**

# 1 What are the symptoms of a common infection?



### Eyes

* Red eyes
* Sticky eyes
* Eyes burn or feel gritty

## Chest

* Cough
* Shortness of breath
* Coughing up green or yellow mucus

## Ears, nose and throat

* Pain or soreness
* Blocked or runny nose
* Swollen tonsils

## Gut

* Nausea
* Vomiting
* Diarrhoea



**2 How common is my infection?**

**Every year in the UK...**

adults have 2 to 3

colds, on average

(more common in children)

1 in 5 people have

a gut infection

1 in 10 people have

a sinus infection

**2 to 3**

Version 2.0. Published: November 2024. Revision date: November 2027. This leaflet has been developed with healthcare professionals, patients and professional medical bodies. TARGET is operated by the UK Health Security Agency.



**3 How can I treat a common infection?**

**Get plenty of rest** until you feel better.

**Take pain relief** if you need to

(make sure you follow the instructions).

**Drink enough fluid** (6 to 8 cups or glasses) to avoid

dehydration, and make sure you pee regularly.

For **coughs**, try honey and cough medicines.

For **sore throats**, try medicated lozenges and pain relief.

Soothe **eye infections** by gently applying a clean cloth, soaked

in water that has been boiled and then cooled, around the eye.

For an **outer-ear infection**, consider over-the-counter ear drops.



**4 How long could my infection last?**

Cough Sore throat

or earache

Common

cold

Norovirus

Sinus

(winter vomiting) infection

Eye

infection

3 to 4

weeks

7 to 8

days

14

days

2 to 3

days

3 to 4

weeks

7 to 14

days

**Contact your GP if your symptoms are getting worse**

**or if you are not better by the times above.**

**Visit** [**www.nhs.uk**](http://www.nhs.uk/) **for self-care advice on common infections**



**5 Will my infection need antibiotics to get better?**

* Your body can normally fight off common infections on its own.
* You do not usually need antibiotics unless symptoms of a bacterial infection are severe – follow your healthcare professional’s

advice on this.

* Taking antibiotics when you do not need to may put you and your family at risk.
* Follow your healthcare professional’s advice on antibiotics.
* Find out more about antibiotics at [**www.antibioticguardian.com**.](http://www.antibioticguardian.com/)

# 6 How can I stop my infection from spreading?



## If you need to cough or sneeze:

### Catch it

with a tissue

(or your inner elbow)

### Bin it

throw away

used tissues

### Kill it

by cleaning your hands

### Clean hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water

**or hand sanitiser:**

* before preparing and eating food • after touching pets or animals
* after using the toilet • when leaving and arriving home

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands. If possible, keep at least 2 metres (6 feet) from others, especially vulnerable people in your household.

Do not share items that come into contact with your mouth, such as eating utensils and toothbrushes.

Keep yourself and your family up to date with vaccinations. Always get winter vaccines (such as flu) if you are eligible.

**Visit or call a pharmacy for further advice on common infections**



**7 What symptoms of serious illness should I look out for?**

Severe **headache**

**and vomiting**

**Breathing** faster or slower

than usual, **chest pain**

or tightness

Ongoing **fever or chills**

(temperature above 38ºC or less than 36ºC)

**Kidney pain** in your back

just under your ribs

Problems **swallowing**

New **very fast or slow pulse**

Coughing **blood**

**Very cold skin**

**If you have the symptoms above, contact your GP urgently or use the following services for your region.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NHS England**  NHS England logo | **NHS 111**  **Wales** | **NHS Scotland** | **Northern Ireland**  Contact your GP practice  Northern Ireland logo |



These services can provide a confidential interpreter if you need one.

**If you suspect sepsis, call 999 immediately**

**8 What if I suspect signs of sepsis?**

**Sepsis is a life-threatening reaction to an infection. Possible signs are:**

* **s**lurred speech, confusion or drowsiness
* **e**xtreme shivering
* **p**assing no urine in a day
* **s**evere breathlessness
* **i**t feels like you’re going to die, and
* **s**kin blotchy or discoloured.