



TARGET

Keep Antibiotics Working

How can I manage my common infection?

A leaflet for adults aged 16 years and over

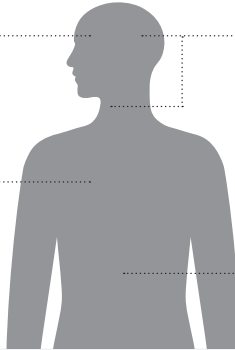
1 What are the symptoms of a common infection?

Eyes

- Red eyes¹
- Sticky eyes¹
- Eyes burn or feel gritty¹

Chest

- Cough⁵
- Shortness of breath⁵
- Coughing up green or yellow mucus⁵



Ears, nose and throat

- Pain or soreness²⁻⁴
- Blocked or runny nose⁴
- Swollen tonsils³

Gut

- Nausea⁶
- Vomiting⁶
- Diarrhoea^{6,7}

2 How common is my infection?

Every year in the UK...

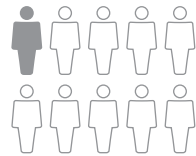
adults have 2 to 3
colds, on average⁸
(more common in children)⁹



1 in 5 people have
a gut infection⁹



1 in 10 people have
a sinus infection¹⁰



3 How can I treat a common infection?



Get plenty of rest until you feel better¹¹.



Take pain relief if you need to (make sure you follow the instructions)¹².



Drink enough fluid (6 to 8 cups or glasses) to avoid dehydration, and make sure you pee regularly¹³.



For **coughs**, try honey and cough medicines⁵.
For **sore throats**, try medicated lozenges and pain relief³.



Soothe **eye infections** by gently applying a clean cloth, soaked in water that has been boiled and then cooled, around the eye¹.



For an **outer-ear infection**, consider over-the-counter ear drops².

4 How long could my infection last?

Cough



3 to 4 weeks¹⁴

Sore throat or earache



7 to 8 days¹⁵

Common cold



14 days¹⁵

Norovirus (winter vomiting)



2 to 3 days¹⁶

Sinus infection



3 to 4 weeks⁴

Eye infection



7 to 14 days¹⁷

Contact your GP if your symptoms are getting worse or if you are not better by the times above.

Visit 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 own¹⁸.
- 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 risk¹⁹.
- Follow your healthcare professional's advice on antibiotics.
- Find out more about antibiotics at 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)²⁰



Bin it
throw away
used tissues²⁰



Kill it
by cleaning
your hands²⁰

Clean hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or hand sanitiser²⁰:

- 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 household²⁰.



Do not share items that come into contact with your mouth, such as eating utensils and toothbrushes²⁰.



Keep yourself and your family up to date with vaccinations. Always get winter vaccines (such as flu) if you are eligible²⁰.

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**²¹



Ongoing **fever or chills** (temperature above 38°C or less than 36°C)^{21,22}



Problems **swallowing**²³



Coughing **blood**²³



Breathing faster or slower than usual, **chest pain** or tightness²²



Kidney pain in your back just under your ribs²⁴



New **very fast or slow pulse**²²



Very cold skin²⁴

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

NHS England



NHS 111
Wales



NHS Scotland



Northern
Ireland

Contact your
GP practice



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

8 What if I suspect signs of sepsis?

Sepsis is a life-threatening reaction to an infection.

Possible signs are²⁵:

- **s**lurred speech, confusion or drowsiness
- **e**xtrême 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.

If you suspect sepsis, call 999 immediately

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