



# HOW CAN I MANAGE MY COMMON INFECTION?

A leaflet for adults aged 16 years and over

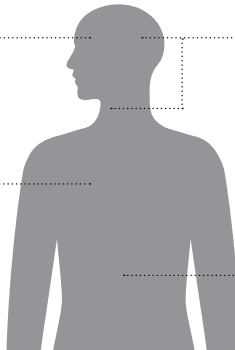
## 1 What are the symptoms of a common infection?

### 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

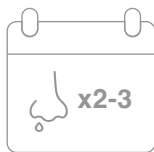
### Gut

- 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



### 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 fluids to avoid dehydration and pass urine regularly (6 to 8 cups or glasses).



For **coughs**, try honey and cough medicines.  
For **sore throats**, try medicated lozenges and pain relief.



Soothe **eye infections** with boiled and cooled water on the eyelids, apply cool compresses gently around the eye.



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

### 4 How long could my infection last?

Cough



3 to 4 weeks

Sore throat or earache



7 to 8 days

Common cold



14 days

Norovirus (winter vomiting)



2 to 3 days

Sinus infection



3 to 4 weeks

Eye infection



7 to 14 days

Contact your GP if your symptoms are getting worse or 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

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**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 your distance from others (2 meters or 6 feet), 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**



Ongoing **fever or chills**  
(temperature above 38°C or  
less than 36°C)



Problems **swallowing**



Coughing **blood**



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



**Kidney pain** in your back  
just under your ribs



New **very fast or slow pulse**



**Very cold skin**

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

NHS England



NHS 111  
Wales

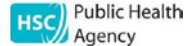


NHS Scotland



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 are:**

- **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