



Summer sniffles

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Introduction

It is often believed that a person can only catch a cold in winter, so how can cold symptoms develop when it's not cold and flu season? During summertime, the cold viruses that cause common colds can spread and infect people just as easily.

Common cold causes

Colds are not caused by cold climates or being exposed to cold air. The common cold is caused by several different viruses. Rhinoviruses cause the greatest number of colds. There are more than 100 different strains, or varieties of rhinoviruses.

Symptoms

The common cold is a viral infection that most people recover from in approximately a week to 10 days. These viruses spread through the air, just like influenza. When they make their way into the mouth, eyes or nose, cold viruses may trigger symptoms.

The persistent stuffiness, runny nose and postnasal drip of the sniffles are often self-diagnosed as a cold, as these are often the first signs of a cold.

Cold symptoms vary from person to person. Along with the sniffles, symptoms may include:

- A scratchy or sore throat
- Watery eyes
- Sneezing
- Coughing

Management

There is no specific treatment or cure for the viruses that cause the common cold. Instead, treatment focuses on symptom relief.

Drinking plenty of fluids (water and other non-caffeinated drinks), getting enough rest, and taking over-the-counter (OTC) medications where appropriate may relieve some of the symptoms of the cold.

There are a variety of OTC medications that may help relieve cold symptoms like nasal congestion, watery eyes and cough.

Pain relievers (analgesics)

Headache and sore throat are best treated with a mild pain reliever such as paracetamol or a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) such as ibuprofen.

Other options

It is recommended to gargle with warm salt water or use ice chips, lozenges or throat sprays for a sore throat.

Decongestants

Decongestants may unblock and relieve a stuffy nose. Decongestant nasal sprays should not be used for more than 2 to 3 consecutive days as this may result in rebound congestion and worsen nasal congestion. Oral decongestant drugs may also cause an increase of blood pressure or rapid heartbeat and treatment should be limited to short-term symptomatic relief.

Antihistamines

Antihistamines may help relieve itchy and watery eyes, sneezing and runny nose. Medications that contain a combination of an antihistamine and a decongestant may also help nasal symptoms.

Cough

Expectorants may help to make coughing up mucus easier. These medications are often combined with other medications in OTC cold formulas. These cough medications provide only minor benefit for cough in most patients, and excessive use may cause side effects.

Saline nose drops/sprays

Saline nasal drops/sprays may help to clear the nose and sinuses. They may keep the nasal passages moist and loosen mucus.

Humidifier and steams

Use a humidifier or vaporiser (or do hot steam showers) to clear passages and ease sinus pressure.

Prevention

The common cold is contagious. There is no way to completely prevent getting a cold, whether in summer or winter. However, there are ways to prevent the spread of the common cold infection.

If the patient is unwell, the following suggestions may help to reduce the spread to others:

- Avoid close contact with others such as hugging, kissing or shaking hands
- Stay home if unwell
- Wash hands regularly
- Alcohol-based rubs are a good alternative for disinfecting hands if a sink is not available
- Tissues should be used to cover the mouth or nose when sneezing or coughing
- Disinfect surfaces that are touched frequently, such as toys and doorknobs
- Wear a face mask

Conclusion

A summer cold generally clears up within a few days, but may persist for up to 2 weeks after first experiencing symptoms. Usually, the symptoms of a cold will resolve over time, even without any treatment. OTC medication may help to relieve symptoms. However, if the patient is experiencing concerning symptoms such as a rash or high fever, they should be referred to a doctor.

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