

Pharmacy First Service for Winter Ailments 2020-2021: Sore Throats and Common Cold**Pharmacy Advice for person accessing Pharmacy First Service with symptoms of Sore Throat or the Common Cold**

Sore throats and the common cold are usually mild, self-limiting **viral** upper respiratory tract infections (most commonly caused by rhinovirus). The symptoms may include:

- Sore or irritated throat with pain on swallowing
- White pus spots on tonsils
- Swollen neck glands
- Nasal irritation, congestion, nasal discharge (rhinorrhoea) and sneezing
- Hoarse voice caused by associated laryngitis
- Headache, feeling tired, feeling sick
- Less common symptoms include myalgia, eye irritability, and a feeling of pressure in the ears or sinuses.

Antibiotics **DO NOT** kill viruses so the majority of patients will not require treatment with antibiotics for these symptoms. In people who are normally well, their own immune system will clear the infection. Antibiotics may cause side-effects such as thrush, diarrhoea, rash and stomach upsets, so they should not be taken unnecessarily. Unnecessary use of antibiotics leads to antimicrobial resistance, meaning antibiotics are less effective for those who need them most.

Adults may experience these symptoms of viral, upper respiratory tract infection on 2–3 times per year. Young children attending primary school or preschool may experience these symptoms 5–8 times per year. Transmission of the viral infection is usually by either direct contact, or aerosol transmission. People can remain infectious for several weeks.

The onset of symptoms is sudden, reaching a peak at day 2–3 and then decreasing in intensity. In adults and older children, symptoms tend to last about a week, although cough can persist for up to 3 weeks. In younger children, symptoms typically last 10–14 days. Smokers tend to have more severe respiratory symptoms (including cough) and the viral infection is more prolonged. The most common complications are sinusitis, lower respiratory tract infections, and acute otitis media.

Advice for a patient with sore throat or common cold includes:

- Reassurance that although the symptoms may be distressing, the condition is generally self-limiting and is likely to get better within 7 days; complications are rare.
- Avoid spread of infection: advise patient on good hand hygiene which includes washing hands frequently and thoroughly for 20 seconds throughout the day with soap and water; covering sneezes with disposable tissues or into the crook of your elbow if tissues are not available. Dispose of tissues in a rubbish bin and immediately wash your hands. Avoiding sharing of towels and for children, discouraging the sharing of toys with an infected child.

- Advise the person or carer to use paracetamol or ibuprofen as an analgesic if needed for the following: *adults and children aged 5 years and over, if the person has a headache or, muscle pain. Children aged less than 5 years, if the child appears distressed.* When using paracetamol or ibuprofen in children, advise the carer to:
 - Continue only as long as the child appears distressed.
 - Consider changing to the other agent if the child's distress is not alleviated.
 - Not to give both agents simultaneously.
 - Only consider alternating these agents if the distress persists or recurs before the next dose is due.
- Adequate fluids should be taken during the course of the condition to avoid dehydration.
- Avoid smoking or smoky environments.
- Adequate rest is advised — it is normally not necessary to stay off work or school. Normal activity will not prolong the illness. Children may return to school or day-care when they are no longer feeling unwell.
- Healthy food is recommended, although no specific diet or mineral or vitamin supplementation is necessary. Reassure parents that it is common for children to lose their appetite for a few days when they have these symptoms; children with symptoms should eat only when they are hungry.
- **For sore throat:** avoid food or drink that is too hot as this could cause further irritation. Adults or older children may find sucking throat lozenges, hard boiled sweets, ice or flavoured frozen desserts (such as ice lollies) provides relief. Gargling with a simple mouthwash such as warm saline solution (half a teaspoon of salt in a glassful of warm water), at frequent intervals until the discomfort and swelling subside may provide additional symptomatic relief (do not swallow the mouthwash).
- **For congestion:** steam inhalation may help to relieve symptoms. Care should be taken to avoid scalding. Sitting in the bathroom with a running hot shower is a safe option. Vapour rubs may soothe respiratory symptoms in infants and small children when applied to the chest and back (avoid application to the nostril area for safety reasons). For adults and children over 6 years decongestants may relieve nasal congestion in the short term, but this effect does not extend past a few days, and the benefit is relatively small.

If patient is referred to their GP or if their condition deteriorates:

- Advise the patient to see a healthcare professional if they do not improve or their condition deteriorates e.g. becomes more difficult to swallow saliva or liquids, or if any difficulty in breathing develops
- If patient is referred to GP following the consultation, explain rationale for referral and offer advice on how best to contact the practice.

Medication supplied during the Pharmacy First Service consultation should be within the product licence, labelled appropriately and counselling offered regarding safe and effective use. People should be advised to follow use instructions carefully and not to use multiple products, particularly those containing paracetamol, because of the risk of overdose.