

Winter infections and using antibiotics

With winter upon us, many people will pick up sniffles, sore throats, colds, and get infections. But it's useful to know the difference between a viral infection and a bacterial infection and how can both be treated.

Viral infections

As their names suggest, viral infections are caused by viruses, bacterial infections by bacteria.

Antibiotics are effective only against bacterial infections – they cannot help you recover from infections caused by viruses.

[Cold](#) and [flu](#) are viruses and antibiotics are useless against them. The best treatment is:

- plenty of rest
- hot drinks
- maybe paracetamol to relieve aches, pains and help reduce a high temperature – make sure not to take more than the stated dosage

Viral infections are very common and, as well as cold and flus, they can include many infections of the nose, sinuses, ears, throat and chest. Most of these can be self-treated without the need for a visit to the doctor and definitely no need for an antibiotic.

In fact if you take antibiotics when you don't need them, you could have some unpleasant side effects like an upset stomach, diarrhoea, or a skin rash.

Don't forget, if you do have a cough or cold, it's important to reduce your chances of spreading it to others by following good hygiene practices:

- [wash your hands](#) regularly
- if you sneeze or cough, use a tissue to help stop the spread of infection

Antibiotics do not prevent viruses such as the common cold or flu from spreading to other persons.

The first place to go if you're feeling unwell is the pharmacist, who can usually provide over-the-counter medication to help deal with your symptoms until your illness passes.

If you must go to the doctor, don't demand antibiotics from them.

Take [your doctor's](#) advice. They'll know what the best action to take is and if they say you don't need an antibiotic, don't demand one.

Bacterial infections

If you have a bacterial infection, your own immune system can clear many of these infections without the need for antibiotics. Antibiotics do little to speed up your recovery from most common infections.

If your symptoms don't go away or if you have any concern, it's important that you see your doctor.

If you really have a severe infection such as bacterial pneumonia, your doctor will prescribe antibiotics.

Antibiotics should only be taken for serious bacterial infections. They are life-saving drugs for infections like pneumonia and meningitis.

If we continue to take antibiotics when we don't need to, bacteria build up resistance, making antibiotics useless against fighting them. As it is the bacteria and not the person that become resistant to the drugs, antibiotic resistance affects everyone.

Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be difficult to treat so we need to protect the antibiotics we have to make sure they work when they're needed most.

We all have a role to play in [using antibiotics wisely](#).

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[Recognising signs and symptoms of mouth cancer](#)

It's important to be aware of the signs and symptoms of mouth cancer. The earlier the disease is spotted the better the chances of a complete cure.

Risks and what to look out for

This form of the disease can happen in or on any part of the mouth, including lining of the mouth, gums, tongue, lips, and throat.

Smoking, regularly drinking large amounts of alcohol, too much sun or use of sunbeds, and the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), can all increase the risk of developing mouth cancer.

In its very early stages, mouth cancer can be easy to ignore. The key signs to watch out for are:

- an ulcer on the lip, tongue, or in the mouth that doesn't heal within three weeks
- pain in the mouth or earache that doesn't go away
- a white or red patch in the mouth that doesn't go away
- a lump or thickening in the mouth, throat, or on the lip
- difficulty or pain when chewing, swallowing, or speaking
- bleeding or numbness in the mouth
- a lump in the neck
- loose teeth for no obvious reason
- unexplained weight loss over a short space of time

[Mouth cancer](#) and the treatment required can be traumatic, as this may affect functions such as speech, chewing and swallowing.

These symptoms are often caused by something less serious and don't usually mean it's cancer. However, if in doubt get checked out by your dentist or GP.

Reduce mouth cancer risk

The most important things to try and reduce the risk of mouth cancer are:

- check for changes in your mouth
- visit your dentist regularly
- get help to [stop smoking](#)
- [limit the amount of alcohol](#) you drink
- reduce the chances of getting [HPV](#) by practising [safer sex](#)
- use sunscreen (at least sun protection factor 15 and four stars) on your lips in hot weather
- don't use [sunbeds](#)
- exercise for at least 30 minutes a day
- eat a [healthy diet](#), including five portions of fruit and vegetables daily

Visit your dentist

It's important to visit your dentist at least once a year, even if you no longer have your own teeth.

Dentists are trained to spot early signs of mouth and salivary gland cancer and can easily see parts of your mouth that you cannot see.

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People urged to get flu jab

The seasonal flu vaccination programme is under way. People are urged to get the jab if offered it. The free flu vaccine offers protection against a number of viruses which are expected to circulate this winter.

Important to get vaccinated

Everyone who gets an invitation to be vaccinated against flu should see it as a positive step in protecting their health and the health of others around them.

The vaccine changes each year to cover the strains which are likely to be around over the course of the flu season, so it's important to get immunised every year.

People aged over 65, 'at risk' children and adults, pregnant women, and pre-school children aged two years and over can get their free flu jab at their GP surgery.

Children in primaries one to seven will be offered the flu vaccine in school.

The vaccine is offered as the best protection to people over 65 and 'at risk' groups because if they get flu, they are more likely to have severe illness and/ or develop complications such as pneumonia, which can be life-threatening.

The vaccine does not give people the flu.

You can find out more at the page below:

If eligible, you should receive a letter or phone call from your GP surgery. If you think you are (or someone you know is) eligible and there hasn't been an invitation to get the jab, or if you have any queries, you should contact your GP directly.

As it takes approximately two weeks following vaccination to develop maximum protection against flu, it is important to get vaccinated early.

If you wait until flu starts circulating, it may be too late for the vaccine to protect you.

Everyone should aim to have the vaccine by early December.

Pregnant women

Pregnant women are more likely to have serious illness if they catch flu.

They will be invited at all stages of pregnancy to get the vaccine by their GP, to help protect them and their unborn baby.

Children

Pre-school and primary school children will be offered the vaccine.

Parents are asked to sign and send back the consent form to school for their primary school children, and to take up the GP's invitation for pre-school vaccination, or they may miss out.

Most children get the vaccine through a quick and painless nasal spray. The nasal vaccine has been shown to provide even greater protection for children than the flu injection.

There are a few children who cannot get the nasal spray and they will be offered the injection instead.

You can find out more on the [Flu vaccine for children page](#).

Flu symptoms

The flu virus spreads easily and quickly through the air when people cough and sneeze without covering their nose and mouth.

The same unpleasant [flu symptoms](#) are experienced by both adults and children:

- fever
- chills
- aching muscles and joints
- headache
- extreme tiredness

These symptoms can last between two and eight days and, for some, can lead to serious illness and result in a stay in hospital.

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[Remember to put clocks back this weekend](#)

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Make sure you remember to put your clocks back this weekend, as British

Summer Time ends on Sunday 28 October. You don't want to miss out on that extra hour in bed.

Reset clocks on Saturday night

You should reset your household clocks, watches and time-based equipment on Saturday night, so you don't spend Sunday trying to figure why you're early and everyone else is late. The equipment you may need to reset includes:

- clocks – especially alarm clocks
- central heating and hot water timers
- your mobile phone and computer (if their time zone settings do not instruct them to automatically take the correct local time from the internet)

Britain and Europe

British Summer Time starts on the last Sunday in March and ends on the last Sunday in October, at 1.00 am Greenwich Mean Time.

This means that:

- in autumn the clocks go back – at 2.00 am British Summer Time moves to 1.00 am Greenwich Mean Time
- in spring the clocks go forward – at 1.00 am Greenwich Mean Time moves to 2.00 am British Summer Time

Since 2002, clocks have changed on standard dates throughout the EU, making things easier for people travelling. The British Isles constantly remains an hour behind most of Central Europe.

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[Be extra alert on roads during darker](#)

months

Date published: 27 October 2017

All road users are urged to be extra alert on the roads over the coming months. We should all pay attention in the worsening weather conditions and the darker evenings during late autumn and winter.

Road safety advice

While visibility decreases in winter months, stopping distances increase. If you're a driver you should:

- adjust your [speed](#)
- think about how the conditions affect more vulnerable [road users](#)
- slow down and pay attention, especially around schools buses when children are getting on and off
- be extra careful to watch out for people walking, cycling or riding a motorbike – they are much more difficult to see, particularly in the dark

Cyclists, motorcyclists, and pedestrians (including children) should take extra precautions by making sure they increase their own visibility to drivers by wearing:

- bright or contrasting clothing by day
- reflective clothing at night

You can get more information about road safety at the page below:

Collectively, we have the ability to reduce road casualties. We all have a personal responsibility, to ourselves and to other road users.

Remember – respect everyone's journey.

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