

A Traveler's Guide to the Common Cold

Developed by the American Pharmacists Association. Improving medication use. Advancing patient care.

Coming down with a cold while you're away from home can turn a business or pleasure trip into drudgery.

You catch a cold when a virus invades your nose or eyes. You might breathe in airborne droplets, but far more often, you catch a cold by touching a germ surface or having direct contact with a person who has a cold and then touching your nose or eyes.

Steering Clear of Colds When You Travel

Your risk of catching a cold is greater when you are indoors most of the time, when the air is dry, and when you have close contact with other people. In trains, planes, and automobiles, you're probably sharing the ride with some of the 200 viruses that cause the common cold.

What can you do to lessen your risk?

- **Avoid prolonged close contact with people who have colds.** Handshaking, hugging, and sharing meals and good times are so much a part of travel, however, that some exposure to cold viruses is probably inevitable.
- **Keep your hands away from your nose and eyes** because cold viruses can live up to 3 hours on your skin.
- **Wash your hands, with soap and water, often.** Scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails—not just your palms—for a full 15 seconds and rinse well. Dry your hands with a disposable towel, and turn off the faucet using the towel. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Clean your personal items.** Cold viruses can live on surfaces (especially nonporous surfaces such as plastic, metal, or glass) for up to 48 hours. Use disinfectant wipes to clean the surfaces you regularly touch as you travel—your laptop keyboard, your cell phone, your car's steering wheel.

Treating a Cold on the Road

The saying goes that there's no cure for the common cold, but even so, you *can* feel more comfortable—even when you're far away from home. Your goal is to relieve your symptoms, and you can do that in three ways.

Try natural ways to feel better:

- **Drink lots of water.** Doctors recommend eight glasses a day to keep your nose and throat moist and to loosen congestion. Avoid alcohol and caffeine drinks because they dry out—or dehydrate—your system. A salt-water gargle may soothe your sore throat.
- **Get plenty of rest.** If possible, adjust the temperature and humidity of your sleeping area to be moist and warm, but not overheated.
- **Eat right.** No scientific evidence backs the old adage, "Starve a cold; feed a fever."
- **Don't smoke.** Smoking can dehydrate your body and make your symptoms worse.

Use over-the-counter medications to treat your symptoms.

Your regular pharmacy back home probably has a branch near your travel destination. Before you leave home, find out the location of the nearest pharmacy, or inquire at your destination. Ask the local pharmacist what over-the-counter products might help. Some common products include the following:

- **Saline nasal sprays** can fight stuffiness and congestion.
- **Decongestants and pain relievers** may relieve your symptoms, even though they will not shorten the duration of your cold. People sometimes complain of feeling feverish with a cold, but colds and fever don't usually go together. However, you may run a temperature of 100°F—enough to slow you down a bit.

Ask the local pharmacist about complementary or alternative treatments such as:

- **Homeopathic remedies** (used within the first 24–48 hours of symptoms) such as zinc lozenges and intranasal zinc gluconate

Recent clinical studies have demonstrated that treatment with intranasal zinc nasal gel is effective in reducing the duration and severity of common cold symptoms within 24–48 hours of symptom onset.

- **Vitamins and herbal supplements** such as vitamin C and echinacea

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✔ Traveler's Shopping List

You won't want to carry your medicine chest with you, of course, but it's smart to take along a few products that you might need on the road.

To manage:	You may want to take along:	Such as:
Stuffy or runny nose	<input type="checkbox"/> A saline nasal spray	Ocean [®] , Ayr [®]
	<input type="checkbox"/> A decongestant	Actifed [®] , Sudafed [®]
	<input type="checkbox"/> An antihistamine	Benadryl [®] , Claritin [®] , Dimetapp [®]
General common cold	<input type="checkbox"/> An intranasal zinc formulation	Zicam [®]
	<input type="checkbox"/> Multisymptom relief	Tylenol Cold [®] , NyQuil [®]
Aches and pains, headache, or feverishness	<input type="checkbox"/> Aspirin	Anacin [®] , Bayer [®] , Ecotrin [®]
	<input type="checkbox"/> Acetaminophen	Anacin-3 [®] , Excedrin Sinus Headache [®] , Tylenol [®]
Cough	<input type="checkbox"/> Cough syrup	DayQuil [®] , Delsym [®] , Robitussin [®] , Vicks-44 [®]
Sore throat	<input type="checkbox"/> Throat lozenges	Cepacol [®] , Chloraseptic [®] , Ricola [®]

More Information

To learn more about colds, visit the following Web sites:

- The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/cold.htm
- The American Lung Association at www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9O0E&b=35873
- The Mayo Clinic at www.mayoclinic.com/health/common-cold/DS00056
- Matrixx Initiatives at www.zicam.com

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