



Summer colds

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The common cold is a viral infection of the upper airways. Colds can be caused by over 200 different viruses. Some of these viruses are more prevalent in cold, dry months i.e. winter, while others are more prevalent in the warmer months of summer.^{1,2}

Rhinoviruses are the most common viruses to infect people. These viruses survive well in cold weather and are responsible for many of the colds experienced in winter. In the warmer weather, however, it is the non-polio enteroviruses which may cause most summer colds. The enteroviruses are the second most common group of viruses to infect people.^{2,3,4} There are more than 60 types of non-polio enteroviruses.^{3,4}

Symptoms

Summer cold symptoms are very similar to those experienced in winter and include:

- Blocked or runny nose
- Post-nasal drip
- Sore throat
- Fever
- Headaches
- Body aches
- Cough^{1,2}

Enterovirus infections commonly present with fever, malaise and headache. Younger children may also show increased drooling, chewing on their hands and a refusal to eat, while older children may complain of sore throat or muscle aches. Enteroviruses reside in the respiratory tract and the gut and may also cause diarrhoea and vomiting.^{2,4,5}

Recuperation from a summer cold is often longer than a winter cold. This may be because patients are more active in summer and don't slow down to recover. During the summer months,

many people also experience allergies, and a summer cold may be misdiagnosed as an allergy or may add to the symptoms of seasonal allergic conditions.

Table I shows the differences between colds and allergies.⁶

Table I. Differences between colds and allergies

Symptom	Cold	Allergy
Cough	Often	Sometimes
Aches	Sometimes	Never
Fatigue	Sometimes	Sometimes
Fever	Sometimes	Never
Itchy, watery eyes	Rarely	Often
Sore throat	Often	Sometimes
Runny or stuffy nose	Often	Often

Prevention

Enteroviruses are transmitted in respiratory secretions such as saliva and mucus. People are infected by direct contact with people who are ill or by touching contaminated surfaces and objects such as door knobs, trolleys and toys. To stay healthy, people should maintain good standards of hygiene such as washing hands, not sharing glasses or utensils and staying away from people who are ill. Contaminated swimming pools may also serve as a means of transmission of the virus.^{1,3,4,5}

Treatment

Summer colds generally clear within 5–10 days. Over-the-counter (OTC) medications are available to treat the symptoms. Antihistamines are used to treat runny noses, and oral and topical decongestants are used to relieve blocked and stuffy sinuses. Painkillers will help relieve headaches and muscle pains. Getting plenty of rest and staying hydrated are other important measures to allow the body to recover from a summer cold.^{2,3}

Note: Antibiotics are **not** useful for treating the common cold; antibiotics are only used to treat illnesses caused by bacteria, not viruses. Unnecessary use of antibiotics for the treatment of the common cold can cause allergic reactions, diarrhoea, or

other gastrointestinal symptoms in some patients as well as increase the risk of antibiotic resistance.

When to see a doctor

Further medical attention should be sought if OTC medications do not provide relief or if symptoms continue for more than five days.

Severe symptoms including fever, body aches, shortness of breath, wheezing, a rash or a bad cough require further intervention. In children, a fever lasting more than two days or a fever of 38 °C in an infant under 12 weeks requires medical care.^{1,2,3}

Conclusion

Summer colds are often ignored or misdiagnosed. Patients should be educated that colds are possible in summer and that treatment is the same as for winter colds.

References

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