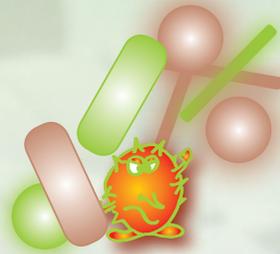
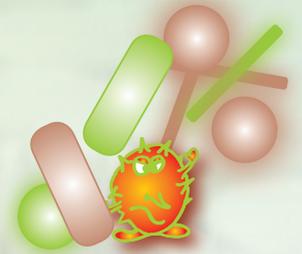


viral infections



- Many common infections of the nose, throat, ears and chest are caused by viruses. In fact all colds and flu are caused by viruses.
- Virus infections are much more common than bacterial infections.
- Virus infections cause symptoms as bad as bacterial infections and can last as long.
- Viruses are very much smaller than bacteria and are made up differently, therefore antibiotics that are made specifically to target bacteria do not kill viruses.
- If you are normally well, your immune system is good at fighting off many types of virus infection.
- You may feel unwell for several days or more until a virus infection clears, colds can last for two weeks and may end with a cough bringing up phlegm.
- Treatment of virus infections aims to ease the symptoms while your immune system fights the infection.
- Drinking plenty of fluids helps to prevent mild dehydration that can occur due to a high temperature. Dehydration can make headaches and tiredness much worse.
- Rest as much as possible, this allows your energy to be used to fight the infection.
- If you have a temperature, try to keep cool. This is particularly important in young children. If a child has a high temperature, keep the bedclothes to a minimum (a sheet only), do not over or underdress them (a nappy and vest or underwear in an older child), put them in a warm, but not hot room and give them paracetamol or ibuprofen. Observe them regularly. Seek advice if worried.
- There are medicines available from your pharmacist to treat the symptoms, for example, paracetamol or ibuprofen to reduce a high temperature (fever), and to ease aches, pains and headaches. Other products are available for specific symptoms, for example, coughs, sore throats and blocked noses. It is important to ask your pharmacist for advice as not all medicines can be used by all patients.

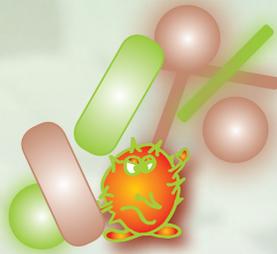
bacterial infections



- In a normally healthy person, the immune system can clear up most bacterial infections, antibiotics usually do little to speed up recovery from bronchitis, ear, nose or throat infections. The treatment advice for virus infections should be followed to ease the symptoms.
- Antibiotics can cause side effects for example, vomiting, allergies, thrush and diarrhoea (which in some cases can be due to the growth of another bacteria called *Clostridium difficile*, commonly known as C.diff. For some people, particularly the elderly, this can be very severe and in rare cases life-threatening).
- Bacteria can adapt and find ways to survive the effects of an antibiotic. They become resistant to the antibiotic which means that it no longer works, this is called antibiotic resistance. An example of a bacteria that has become resistant to many antibiotics is MRSA, that is why it is so difficult to treat.
- The more often an antibiotic is used, the more likely it is that bacteria will become resistant. Therefore it is important to only use antibiotics when there will be a clear clinical benefit, otherwise antibiotics might not be as effective when they are really needed.
- More bacteria are developing resistance all the time and there are currently no new antibiotics available. If we do not preserve those antibiotics that still work, there may be no effective antibiotics left for future generations.
- It is important when you are prescribed an antibiotic to take them as directed by your doctor and to completely finish the course unless instructed otherwise. If the course is not completed, some bacteria may be left over and develop resistance.



when to consult your doctor



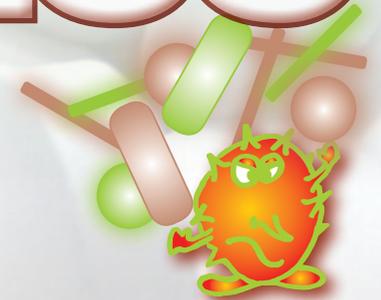
- Your doctor is skilled at checking your symptoms and advising if an antibiotic is necessary.
- You should consult your doctor if you are worried, particularly about a child or vulnerable person, if your illness changes or worsens after a few days or if you develop new symptoms.
- If a cold lasts more than three weeks, if you become breathless or have chest pains, already have a chest complaint or other long term illness, e.g Diabetes, you should consult your doctor.
- Your doctor will only prescribe antibiotics when needed for example a kidney infection or pneumonia.
- Antibiotics are life-saving medicines for some bacterial infections including meningitis. By making sure we only use them when needed, they are more likely to continue working against these illnesses for longer.

Milton Keynes 
Community Health Services

For further copies contact Infection Control Team on 01908 243082.
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advice



on viral and bacterial infections and how to treat them

