

Viral Bronchitis

Viral Bronchitis often starts with a common cold and its typical symptoms like a sore throat, sneezing, and runny nose. The virus that causes the cold then moves down to the lungs and causes inflammation of Bronchi, the large airways. The resulting symptoms include a cough, which may produce phlegm; wheezing, shortness of breath, and tiredness.

“Antibiotics are not used to treat Viral Bronchitis because antibiotics are used for bacterial infections and the most common cause of bronchitis is viruses.”

But there are things you can do at home to reduce symptoms, including getting lots of rest and drinking plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke as well as strong fumes from household cleaners or paint, which can irritate the lungs and make symptoms worse. Sucking on a lozenge may help calm your cough. Over-the-counter cough medicines are another option, though their effectiveness may be limited. Over-the-counter pain relievers like Acetaminophen can reduce achiness and fever.

“These medications can't cure viral bronchitis or make it go away sooner. They just relieve symptoms.”

How long you're contagious depends on what caused your illness. Usually, you can infect others for as long as you have cold or bronchitis symptoms. Avoid spreading your germs by washing your hands frequently with soap and water. Cover your nose and mouth when you cough – ideally into a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve rather than your hands. See your health care provider if your cough lasts more than 3 weeks, you have a fever higher than 100.4 for more than three days, you have trouble breathing, or there's blood in your phlegm.

“These may be signs of a more serious infection, so it's important to be vigilant. In most cases, though, bronchitis gets better on its own and symptoms go away within a few weeks.”