



SUMMER COLDS

An unexpected summer cold can be just as miserable as the more predictable winter illness. Although we usually expect colds to occur in the fall and winter, the nasty viruses that cause them are still around in the summer, and they seem ready to pounce just as we're ready for a summer vacation.

Summer colds, like their winter cousins, are caused by a large family of viruses. Common cold viruses are not only prevalent but worldwide, and summer travel puts us in contact with many of them. Colds are spread in crowded indoor areas and by contaminated surfaces such as door handles, telephones and slot machines. The viruses can live for hours on such surfaces and when we touch contaminated items we pick up the virus and transfer infection to our nose or eye tissues. Although we cannot avoid touching contaminated surfaces, and we cannot completely avoid crowded areas, we can decrease our risk of infection by washing our hands frequently. Many other viruses are also spread in the same manner and this simple precaution may also help prevent other infections.

Although summer colds occur less frequently than winter ones, there are some special factors that increase the risk of infection.

- Long haul jet flights. We are squeezed in tight with several hundred potential sources of common cold infection. Experiments on exposing uninfected volunteers to others with common cold infections have shown that the chances of catching a cold are directly related to the number of hours of exposure to infection.
- Air conditioning. Air conditioners cool and remove moisture from the air. This causes drying of the protective mucous lining of the nose and predisposes to infection. Viruses like to grow in a cold nose.
- Travel to foreign countries. We are used to our own viruses and may have developed some immunity, but travel exposes us to new viruses to which we have no immunity.
- Hay fever. Common in spring and summer, allergic rhinitis disrupts the integrity of the nasal mucous membranes and, like air conditioning, predisposes to infections. Also the nose is already sensitized by the allergic response and this may result in more severe symptoms and longer duration of illness than a winter cold.

Treatment of summer colds involves measures such as decongestants, cough medications, acetaminophen or anti-inflammatory for fever, and antihistamines if there is an allergic component. Rest, drink plenty of non-alcoholic beverages, especially water, use a humidifier in the room where you sleep, and expect to get well in 7 to 10 days. If symptoms persist longer or worsen, seek professional assistance from your health care provider.

For information regarding summer colds, contact personnel at the Student Health Center at (775)784-6598.