

Diary of A COLD

Understand how a cold virus lives and works – and you're more likely to head one off

DAY 1

You feel healthy and go about your normal life, such as taking money out at the cash point.

Beware! 'If someone sneezed into their hand before using the ATM, the virus could be deposited there and remain for up to 48 hours, waiting to be transferred through touching it,' explains Valerie Edwards-Jones, Professor of Medical Microbiology at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Keyboards, phones and door knobs can harbour cold germs too.

WHAT TO DO Keep your immune system in tip-top condition. 'Probiotic bugs such as lactobacilli and bifidobacteria are proven to increase the number of infection-fighting T cells, helping to ward off colds and flu,' says Glenn Gibson, Professor of Microbial Sciences at Reading University. **Try Bio-Kult, £8.99 (www.bio-kult.com). It's said to strengthen your immunity within days.**

DAY 2

You're queuing in a shop when someone near you coughs and/or sneezes, spraying particles of the virus about three feet around them.

'If you're within range, you're likely to inhale these germs,' says Professor Edwards-Jones. 'There are hundreds of viruses that all cause colds – and multiple opportunities like this for one to infect you.'

WHAT TO DO To lower your risk, try new ImmunPRO Infection Blocker, £15.95 from Holland & Barrett. According to researchers in Germany, its key ingredient, cistus villosus, creates an immediate physical barrier in the mouth and throat that protects against viruses. One tablet should provide cover for up to two hours.

Alternatively, try NasalGuard Cold & Flu Block, £11.99 at Boots, to help trap and block airborne viruses.

23%
The number of people who seek medical advice after suffering a cold for a week or less. NICE guidelines state that a common cold lasts for seven to 10 days.

DAY 3

Even if you avoided the virus you met in the shop yesterday, you're about to use the cash machine again where the cold germs are still alive and well.

'Once the virus is on your hand, you're at risk if you touch your nose, mouth or eyes, which is why experts recommend washing hands regularly and thoroughly in the cold season, especially before eating,' says Professor Edwards-Jones.

WHAT TO DO Keep a handbag-sized hand sanitiser with you to use when you're out and about.

Boots Anti-Viral Hand Foam, £5.19 for 200ml, kills 99.9 per cent of viruses and bacteria. It works for up to six hours.



Antibiotics are not an effective treatment for most colds or flu. Taking them can also lead to resistance, so that when you do need them they might not work.

DAY 4

Twenty four hours later you're still feeling well – but if the virus has taken up residence in your respiratory system, it will now be making hundreds of copies of itself.

'If you haven't started taking immune boosters, do so as soon as you know you've been around other people with colds,' advises Professor Edwards-Jones.

WHAT TO DO Echinacea (A Vogel Echinaforce, £9.15 for 50ml, or Potter's Elixir of Echinacea Plus, £10.99 for 135ml, both at Boots) and black elderberry (Sambucol Immuno Forte effervescent tablets, £8.99 for 15) are said to shorten the duration of colds and can be taken as immune boosters. **Be sure to follow the pack's instructions.**



AND TO PROTECT OTHER PEOPLE... If you feel you're about to cough or sneeze, try to cover your mouth and nose. If you haven't got a tissue, use the crook of your elbow rather than your hands to avoid spreading the infection by touch.

DAY 5

Cold symptoms typically take 48 hours to appear – a sore throat is a sign you've got a cold.

'The virus first infects and inflames the adenoid tissue at the back of the nose and this gives the sore, scratchy-throat sensation,' says Professor Ron Eccles, Director of the Common Cold Centre at Cardiff University.

WHAT TO DO Try Ultra Chloraseptic Anaesthetic Throat Spray, £5.45 at Boots.



DAYS 6 TO 9

Expect these symptoms: sneezing, snuffles and blocked nose, which are caused by inflammation and increased mucus production as the body tries to destroy the virus.

This may be as far as your cold goes if you have only inhaled a few particles of a virus you've encountered before.

'During this phase nasal decongestants – such as Olbas Oil [£3.25 for 15ml at Boots] – are more effective than oral ones,' explains Professor Eccles.

Some people prefer seawater saline sprays such as Stérimar (www.sterimar.com).

Aches and pains and a fever are another sign that your body is trying to fight back. A fever is your body's way of trying to slow down the replication of the virus. Taking a painkiller should help you feel a bit better.

A cough shows that the virus has reached your voicebox – and it can drag on for weeks.

Research shows that the herb pelargonium helps reduce symptoms. Try Kaloba, £6.99 for 20ml at Boots.



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