

Holiday Wellness: Tips for Staying Healthy During RTI Season

Respiratory tract infections, or RTIs, affect millions of Americans each year, often threatening lost workdays or daily activities and sometimes posing serious health issues. This year, the incidence of respiratory tract infections around the country is expected to peak between the end of November and the beginning of January. Because it is difficult to distinguish between the symptoms of a bacterial infection (which can be treated with antibiotics) and a viral infection, there is often confusion about whether to see a health care professional. When symptoms of respiratory trouble linger for more than a few days, consult your health care professional. Here are some more tips to help you and your guests stay well during holiday travel and gatherings:

Holiday Gatherings

- Wash hands frequently – use soap and warm water before and after preparing food and using the toilet
- Get proper bed rest – keep to your sleep schedule as much as possible
- Use paper towels – don't dry hands on a dishtowel or apron where germs and bacteria can fester; provide guests with disposable hand towels
- Replace sponges frequently – they can harbor most kitchen bacteria
- Label guest glasses – popular "guest charms" (ornaments fitted on the base of cocktail glasses) prevent guests from accidentally sharing drinks
- Use plastic utensils of varying colors so guests don't accidentally share them
- Stock/drink non-alcoholic beverages – drink plenty of water
- Serve individual portions – prevent guests from spreading germs when sharing from the same platters
- Don't kiss & hug/shake hands – if you feel sick, do your host/guests a favor and keep your germs to yourself
- Bring your own bedding – reduce the risk of exposure to germs
- Don't double dip – scoop small portions of food onto your plate

Overall Respiratory Health Maintenance

- Avoid smoking or secondhand smoke, dust and other air pollutants
- Consider a flu shot and/or a pneumonia vaccination especially if you are at risk
- Maintain a well-balanced diet (pack healthy snacks for long car rides and layovers)
- Run humidifiers in dry rooms
- Dress appropriately to keep warm
- Make sure your air conditioning and heating systems are clean
- Avoid crowded areas (e.g., subways, buses)
- Visit your health care professional: If you suspect you have an RTI, please consult your health care professional to appropriately evaluate your condition

**COMMON ADULT RESPIRATORY TRACT INFECTIONS (RTIs)**

In addition to the flu, these are some common adult respiratory tract infections:

- **Bronchitis** - Bronchitis is an inflammation of the lining of the major breathing tubes (called bronchial tubes or bronchi) that connect the windpipe (called the trachea) to the lungs.¹
- **Sinusitis** - Sinusitis is an inflammatory disease of the sinuses. This painful condition often develops after a cold when mucus does not drain properly and bacteria spread from the nose into the sinuses.²
- **Community Acquired Pneumonia** - CAP, the most common form of pneumonia, is an acute infection of the lung tissue occurring in a person who has not been hospitalized for at least 14 days before symptoms occur (hence "community-acquired").³

Respiratory tract infections can be bacterial or viral. They can arise from complications of the common cold or other RTIs and can lead to more serious forms of respiratory infections. For example, pneumonia can be caused by complications of bronchitis.

It is important to contact your health care professional if you experience symptoms of any respiratory infection. Symptoms can include a sore, scratchy throat; slight fever; back and muscle pain; a cough with or without phlegm production; chills; and runny nose.

TREATMENT FOR BACTERIAL RTIS

When a respiratory tract infection is bacterial, your health care professional may prescribe an antibiotic to eradicate the infection. Treatment of respiratory infections is usually aimed at destroying the bacteria, and preventing complications. The duration of treatment normally ranges from 5 to 14 days, depending upon the infection and the antibiotic prescribed.

¹ American Lung Association, Chronic Bronchitis Fact Sheet, 1998, pg. 1.

² Data on file.

³ Bartlett JG, Brelman, RF, Mandell LA, File TM. Guidelines from the Infectious Diseases Society of America: Community-acquired pneumonia in adults: guidelines for management. Clin Inf Dis 1998; 26:811-838 pg.813.