

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you or your child develops a sore throat. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek medical advice from a health professional.

Could it be Coronavirus?

It is still important to be mindful about coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, which are the same for adults and children and can include the symptoms below. Many of these are similar to symptoms of illnesses such as colds and flu.

- A high temperature
- A new and continuous cough
- A loss or change to your sense of smell or taste
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling tired, or exhausted
- A headache
- A sore throat
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Feeling sick or being sick
- An aching body
- A blocked or runny nose

You should consult the advice specific to your area in the UK:

If you are in a high risk group, it is important that you read the appropriate sections and make contact with the recommended agencies if you have symptoms or queries.

For advice on what to do if you have symptoms, testing and vaccination information, please visit:

- NHS England: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Northern Ireland NIDirect: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>
- NHS Inform for Scotland: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>
- NHS Wales 111: [https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/c/article/coronavirus\(covid19\)/](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/c/article/coronavirus(covid19)/)

Useful facts

How common is sore throat? Around half of the population will have at least one sore throat a year.

What causes a sore throat? A sore throat is usually caused by an infection with germs called viruses or bacteria and will generally get better by itself. If you suffer from bacterial tonsillitis you may see whitish pus on your tonsils (the two clumps of tissue on either side of your throat), have painful glands in your neck and a fever – but no cough. The Epstein-Barr virus, which causes glandular fever, is responsible for up to one in ten cases of sore throat.

What can I expect to happen?

How long are my symptoms likely to last? Four out of five sore throats will get better within 7 days (and a maximum of 2 weeks) without the need for treatment by a health professional.

Will I need antibiotics? You won't normally need antibiotics (which can often do more harm than good if given unnecessarily) for most throat infections, which are caused by viruses.

What will I be asked? If you do see a doctor or nurse, they may ask you some questions and examine your throat to decide if you are one of the small number of people who require antibiotics.

Will I need any tests? You are unlikely to need any tests, but occasionally a throat swab is taken, or a blood test for glandular fever. If you suspect that you have coronavirus symptoms see the section above for advice.

What can I do myself to get better – now and in the future?

Home remedies You can relieve symptoms of sore throat by eating cool, soft food and drinking cool or warm drinks and sucking ice lollies. Adults can try sucking lozenges, ice cubes, or hard sweets and gargling with warm, salty water which may also help reduce swelling and pain.

Smoking Avoid smoking and smoky environments as much as you can.

Fluids Adults should drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of fluid (preferably water) every day, particularly if you also have a fever. Offer your child regular fluids. If you're a breastfeeding mother, offer your child as many feeds as she/he will take.

Pain killers Painkillers such as Paracetamol and ibuprofen can help to relieve symptoms of sore throat, fever, and headaches in adults. Use what suits you best and talk to a member of your pharmacy team if you're unsure. Do not give paracetamol to a child under 2 months. Do not give ibuprofen to a child under 3 months or under 5kg or to children with asthma.

Never give Aspirin to under 16s.

Schooling/nursery Children can go to school or nursery with a sore throat but should stay at home until any fever goes away.

Gargles, lozenges and sprays You may find some of these over the counter preparations helpful.

A member of your pharmacy team can help with advice on managing symptoms.

When to seek medical help

Seek medical advice if your symptoms are no better after 2 weeks or if you have frequent sore throats that do not respond to painkillers.

Warning symptoms and signs

High fever With any temperature over 37.8°C, consider whether you or your child has Covid -19 (see coronavirus section above) and follow our earlier advice. If they then have a persistent high temperature of over 38°C for more than three days that does not come down, even with ibuprofen and/or paracetamol, you should contact your GP or call 111.

For children under 5 with a raised temperature see our factsheet 'Fever in Children'.

Glandular fever A sore throat that doesn't get better within 10 to 14 days or that gets worse rather than better may suggest glandular fever.

Severity Your pain is severe and does not respond to over the counter pain killers.

Voice changes Your voice becomes muffled.

Fluid intake You find it difficult to drink enough fluids and become dehydrated

Effect on day to day life Your symptoms are so bad that they severely affect your quality of life and prevent you from functioning normally.

HIV/AIDS or other causes of reduced immunity If you suffer from a sore throat and have a deficient immune system because, for example, you have HIV/AIDS, or you take certain medication (such as chemotherapy, high dose steroids, disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs, or a drug called carbimazole), you should seek medical advice if you develop a sore throat.

If you have any of the above symptoms contact your surgery or ring NHS111 in England and Wales, the Phone First service in Northern Ireland or NHS24 in Scotland. They will tell you what to do and can arrange a call from a health care professional if you need one.

Call 999 or go to A & E if you or your child has any of these:

Breathing You find it hard to breathe in, and your throat feels like it's closing up or your breathing sounds high pitched sound (stridor) when you breathe

Drooling and swallowing You're drooling and find it difficult to swallow even small quantities of water – this is an emergency!

Severity Your symptoms are severe and getting worse quickly

Where can I find out more?

Remember, a member of your pharmacy team can help with assessing and managing symptoms and advise if you need further help or visit an NHS website:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sore-throat>