

Viral Sore Throat

What is a viral sore throat?

A viral sore throat is an infection of the throat caused by a virus.

What is the cause?

Many different viruses can cause a sore throat, including:

- Flu viruses
- Common cold viruses
- Coxsackievirus, which causes a very painful throat infection called herpangina
- Infectious mononucleosis ("mono") virus

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms will vary slightly depending on the type of virus causing the infection.

Symptoms of **flu** virus infections may include:

- Sore throat
- Cough
- Fever
- Muscle aches

Symptoms of infection with a **cold** virus may include:

- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Cough
- White bumps on the tonsils
- Mild soreness and swelling of the lymph nodes in your neck

Symptoms of **herpangina** may include:

- Sore throat
- Fever
- Headache
- Poor appetite
- Pain in the stomach, neck, arms, and legs
- Painful sores on the throat, tongue, or roof of the mouth

Symptoms of **infectious mononucleosis** may include:

- Fever
- Extreme, prolonged fatigue lasting at least 1 week and usually longer
- Swollen tonsils
- White coating on the tonsils and throat

- Red spots on the roof of the mouth
- Large swollen lymph nodes ("glands") in the neck
- Faint red rash on the chest or whole body

How is it diagnosed?

It is often hard to tell whether a sore throat is caused by a virus or by strep bacteria. In general, the main symptom of strep throat is a severe sore throat with trouble swallowing. Other possible symptoms of strep are fever, swollen lymph nodes in the neck, white spots on the tonsils, and sometimes headache. On the other hand, sneezing, a runny nose, and nasal congestion are common symptoms of infections by a virus, including those that cause sore throats.

To diagnose a viral sore throat, your healthcare provider will review your symptoms and examine you. He or she may also take a throat swab to check for strep throat. Many offices and clinics now have very accurate rapid throat swab tests that allow diagnosis of strep within a few minutes or a few hours.

If your provider suspects mononucleosis, a blood test may also be done.

How is it treated?

The treatment of a viral sore throat is similar to that of the common cold. Your healthcare provider will usually not prescribe antibiotics because antibiotics do not kill viruses. To relieve pain:

- Take nonprescription pain medicine.
- Gargle with warm water. Some people feel more relief if some salt is added to the water.

Other possible treatment depends on the type of virus causing the infection.

How long will the effects last?

The effects will last as long as the virus affects the body. Most viral infections last from several days to 2 weeks. Mononucleosis may last longer.

Virus infections can be more serious for older adults.

How can I take care of myself?

To help take care of yourself, take the full course of treatment your healthcare provider prescribes. Get lots of rest until the fever is gone.

For a sore throat:

- Drink chicken soup, cold drinks, and other clear, nutritious liquids. If it is painful to eat, don't eat solid food. When you can eat, eat healthy foods.
- Do not smoke cigarettes or breathe secondhand smoke.
- Gargle and spit with warm saltwater (1/4 teaspoon salt per 8 ounces, or 240 mL, of warm water) as often as is comfortable.
- Suck on hard lozenges or candy.

- Take nonprescription pain relief medicine according to the directions on the package.
- Limit activities, especially those requiring talking.

If you have a fever:

- Ask your healthcare provider if you can take aspirin or acetaminophen to control your fever. Do not give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, do not take for more than 10 days for any reason.

If you have diarrhea:

- Drink clear liquids such as water, juice, tea, and bouillon often during the day.
- Reduce your normal activities until the diarrhea has stopped.
- If you are nauseated, suck on ice chips.
- When you feel better, eat soft foods like cooked cereal, rice, applesauce, baked potato, and soups. You may also have carbonated drinks.
- Return to normal eating 2 or 3 days later. Avoid alcohol, milk products, and highly seasoned and spicy foods for several more days.

Ask your provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I help prevent spread of viral sore throat?

If you have been diagnosed with a viral sore throat:

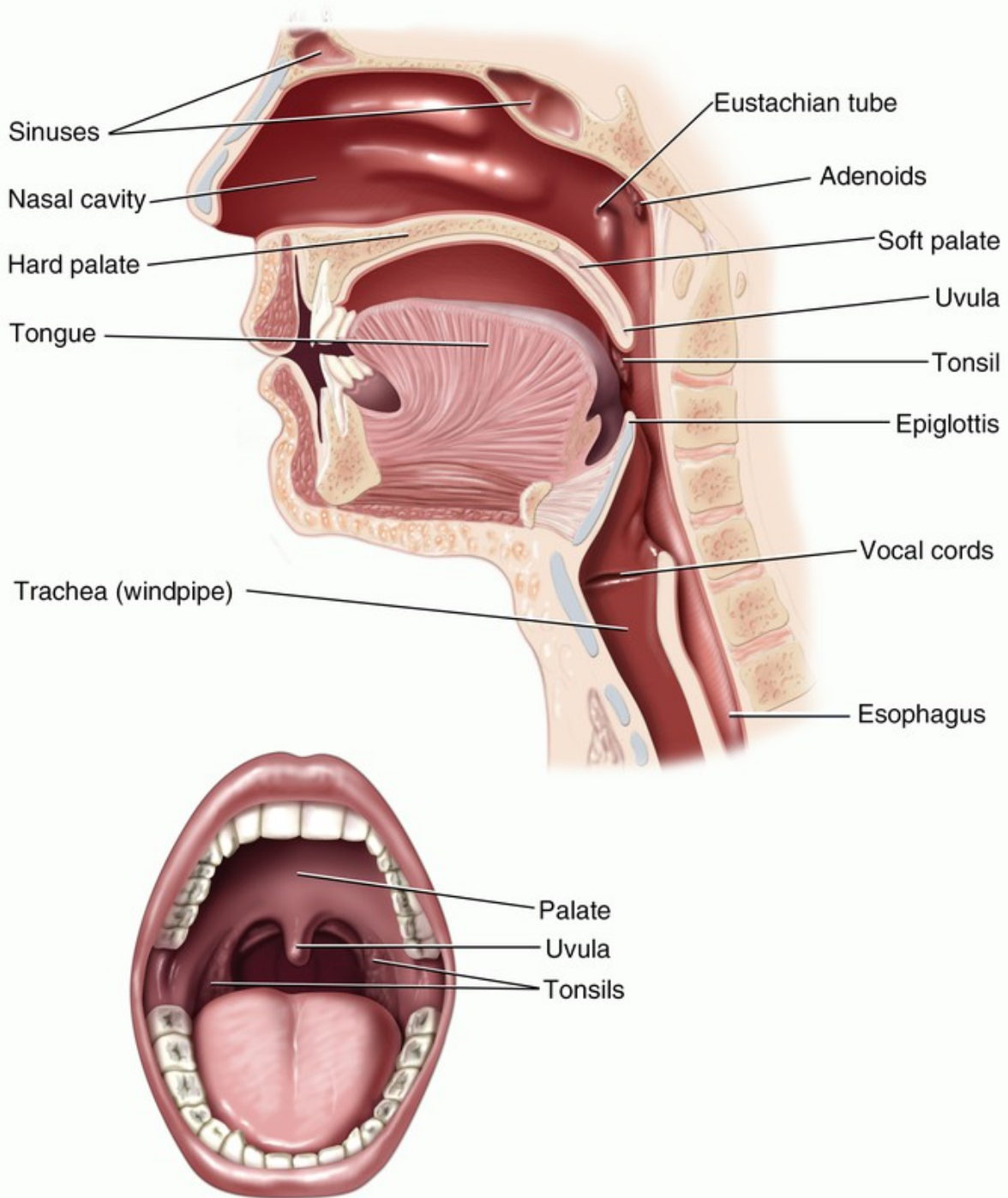
- Avoid contact with others until your symptoms are gone. However, many viruses are most contagious before symptoms start.
- Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Use tissues when coughing or sneezing and throw them in the trash right away.
- Wash your hands before touching food or food-related items such as dishes, glasses, silverware, or napkins.
- Don't share food or eating utensils with others.

- Use paper cups and paper towels in bathrooms instead of common drinking cups or shared hand towels.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Head and Throat



Copyright ©2014 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All rights reserved.