

Bacterial vs. Viral Infections: What's the difference?



Virus

Common cold

Chicken pox

Influenza

Rabies

COVID-19

A **virus** requires a living host (people, plants or animals) to multiply and survive. Once inside your body, it hijacks the cells, which in turn, start to produce the virus.

Bacterial Infection

UTI

Strep throat

Tetanus

Lyme disease

Whooping cough

A **bacterial infection** is caused by less than 1 percent of bacteria; most bacteria are harmless or even helpful (in digestion or in the making of foods like yogurt). Infectious bacteria reproduce quickly in the body, causing illness and damaging tissue.

Why does it matter?

1

Antibiotics **don't work** against viruses

If you are suffering from a viral illness and it's treated as bacterial (with antibiotics), there will be **no benefit**. You may also experience **side effects** from the antibiotic (upset stomach, yeast infection, diarrhea), leaving you feeling even **worse** than before.

Bottom line:

Antibiotics, when unwarranted, are all risk, no reward

2

Antibiotic overuse leads to **antibiotic resistance**

When antibiotics are overprescribed and overused, **germs learn to adapt**. This results in antibiotics becoming less or completely **ineffective** when you really do need them.

Bottom line:

The tougher and more resistant germs become, the less power modern medicine has to fight them

3

The right diagnosis leads to the most **effective treatment**

If you receive an antibiotic for a viral infection, you risk delaying the **right treatment**, such as cough medicine, that will get you back to feeling better. In the case of the flu, where an antiviral treatment is available, it works best when started **within 48 hours of getting sick**.

Bottom line:

The right diagnosis counts

How does a 98point6 doctor know the difference?



Roxana Cham, MD

We listen, focusing on **duration of symptoms** and **response to treatment so far**

We **track outbreaks** occurring throughout the country and **compare to known viral and bacterial patterns** in trusted, verified medical literature

We **consider your medical history** in conjunction with **evidence-based medical practice guidelines** and the **wisdom of physician experience**

We may order **lab testing**, if deemed necessary

What's the best treatment?

If you have a **viral illness**:

- Support the body while it fights the illness, which can last up to 7–14 days.
- This means treating the symptoms, such as hacking cough, congested sinuses and sore throat, so you are more comfortable during the day and can get the nightly rest you need.

If you have a **bacterial illness**:

- Antibiotics may be the preferred course of action.
- Trust that your physician will take each visit on a case-by-case basis and evaluate whether antibiotics are appropriate. Know that the treatment that worked in the past may not be the right course of action today.

Experiencing symptoms?

Our physicians will make sure you get the right treatment—and help you understand if antibiotics are the right choice.

Start a visit now.

Sources

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/infectious-diseases/expert-answers/infectious-disease/faq-20058098#:~:text=As%20you%20might%20think%2C%20bacterial,aren't%20effective%20against%20viruses>
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