

Viruses or Bacteria

What's got you sick?

Antibiotics are only needed for treating certain infections caused by bacteria. Viral illnesses cannot be treated with antibiotics. When antibiotics aren't needed, they won't help you, and the side effects could still cause harm.

Common Condition	Common Cause			Are Antibiotics Needed?
	Bacteria	Bacteria or Virus	Virus	
Common cold/runny nose			✓	No
Sore throat (except strep)			✓	No
Flu			✓	No
Acute bronchitis/chest cold		✓		No ¹
Sinus infection		✓		Maybe
Pneumonia		✓		Yes
Strep throat	✓			Yes
Urinary tract infection	✓			Yes ²

1. In residents without chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or other chronic lung diseases.

2. Except in cases of a positive test without symptoms.



To learn more about antibiotic prescribing and use, visit www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use.

