

Virus or Bacteria

When are antibiotics needed?



Antibiotics are often prescribed for respiratory infections, even when they aren't needed. Antibiotics only treat certain bacterial infections and do not work against viruses.

Common respiratory infection	Common cause			Are antibiotics needed?
	Virus	Virus OR Bacteria	Bacteria	
Common cold/runny nose	✓			No
Sore throat (except strep)	✓			No
COVID-19	✓			No
Flu	✓			No
Bronchitis/chest cold (in otherwise healthy children and adults)*		✓		No*
Middle ear infection		✓		Maybe
Sinus infection		✓		Maybe
Strep throat			✓	Yes
Whooping cough			✓	Yes

*Studies show that in otherwise healthy children and adults, antibiotics for bronchitis won't help you feel better.