

Infection Prevention and You



What you need to know about adenovirus

Adenovirus infections have recently been in the news for causing outbreaks in infants and young adults from two states. Adenovirus infections are common in the late winter, spring, and early summer, overlapping with flu season. Though these viral respiratory infections may easily be mistaken for the flu, there are distinct differences to keep in mind. Adenovirus infections can cause a variety of symptoms from sore throat and runny nose to pink eye and diarrhea.

There are nearly 50 different strains of adenovirus known to cause illnesses across the world. Some of these strains are more severe than others, such as strain 7, which caused a recent outbreak among college students in Maryland. Some strains of adenovirus may cause digestive tract infections among young children, and most children by the age of 10 have had one form of adenovirus.

How does adenovirus spread?

Adenovirus-caused respiratory infections (like croup, bronchitis, or pneumonia) are primarily spread from infected persons to others when respiratory hygiene is not performed. Proper respiratory hygiene includes covering your cough and promptly cleaning your hands. Respiratory hygiene is an easy way to prevent infections spread by respiratory droplets, like adenovirus.

Respiratory hygiene includes:

- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing;
- Throwing away your tissues in the nearest trash can; and
- Performing hand hygiene after coughing/sneezing/disposing of tissues.

In intestinal tract infections caused by adenovirus, others become sick from fecal-oral contact, which is almost always related to poor hand hygiene practices. Take care to avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth after caring for a family member or patient with adenovirus until after hand hygiene is performed.

An infected person may continue to spread the virus for a long time, even after his/her symptoms improve. Therefore, it is important to continue prevention measures, including cleaning/disinfecting of potentially-contaminated surfaces.

How can you prevent the spread of adenovirus to other people?

You can protect yourself and others from adenoviruses and other respiratory illnesses by following these steps from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Clean your hands often with soap and water.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

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If you're sick, the CDC recommends that you:

- Stay home from work or school.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid sharing cups and eating utensils with others.
- Refrain from kissing others.
- Clean your hands often with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom.

Diagnosis and treatment

There is no cure for adenovirus, so diagnosis is primarily focused on ruling out other sources of infection and supportive therapy. Diagnosis may include a complete history and physical, blood tests, culture of respiratory secretions by nasal swab, stool culture, and/or chest imaging tests. Treatment depends on the severity of the illness. In general, it aims to relieve symptoms and improve hydration. Encourage the infected person to drink lots of fluids to stay hydrated.

If you suspect you have an adenovirus or other respiratory illness, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

Additional resources

- The CDC—Adenoviruses <https://www.cdc.gov/adenovirus/about/prevention-treatment.html>
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia—Adenovirus infections <https://www.chop.edu/conditions-diseases/adenovirus-infections>
- APIC *Infection Prevention and You*—Infection Prevention Basics <http://www.apic.org/infectionpreventionbasics>

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