

What are adenoviruses?

Adenoviruses are a group of viruses that cause respiratory infection, which may have a range of symptoms from the common cold to pneumonia (infection of the lungs). Adenoviruses may also cause infections of the eye, urinary tract infections in children, diarrhea in infants, and infections of the brain and spinal cord. Patients with poorly functioning immune systems are especially prone to severe and life-threatening infections.

Who can be infected?

Anyone can be infected. Persons living in close proximity to one another, such as military personnel and persons in long-term care facilities, are more likely to be infected due to the crowding of a susceptible population.

How does a person acquire this infection?

These viruses are spread by fecal-oral transmission or by inhalation of airborne droplets; more importantly, indirectly by hands and articles freshly soiled by discharges of nose, throat, and eyes of an infected person.

What are the symptoms?

Adenovirus-induced respiratory illness may mimic other diseases, such as pertussis (whooping cough). The most common symptoms of lung and eye infections are cough, fever, sore throat, runny nose, and redness of the eyes. Differentiation can be accomplished through a laboratory test. Other symptoms can occur, depending on the site of infection, and may include pain with urination accompanied by increased urinary frequency (urinary tract infections), watery diarrhea and fever (gastroenteritis).

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

The symptoms usually start 4 - 5 days after infection, but may begin as early as 2 days to as late as 14 days.

How long can a person spread adenoviruses?

People are most likely to spread the virus during the first few days of their illness, but can spread the virus to others for months.

What is the treatment for adenoviruses?

There are no specific drugs available for the treatment of adenoviruses. Antibiotics do not work on adenoviruses as they are only effective on bacteria. Most people get well without treatment.

How can the spread of adenoviruses be prevented?

1. Attention to good handwashing should occur at all times.
2. Cover the mouth when coughing and sneezing.
3. Properly dispose of tissues.
4. Avoid crowding in living and sleeping quarters, when possible.
5. Provide adequate ventilation.
6. Avoid smoking in households with small children, whose risk of pneumonia increases when exposed to second-hand smoke.
7. Avoid sharing of eyedroppers, medications, eye make-up, and towels.