Upper Respiratory Infection (The Common Cold)
Jenna Okerblom, DO
Family Medicine Resident at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital

What is it?
- Most commonly caused by respiratory viruses.
- Signs and symptoms of the common cold include fever, cough, runny nose, congestion, sore throat, headache, and aches and pains all over.
- Usually lasts about 10 days.

How do we treat it?
- Since a cold is usually caused by a virus, treatment is primarily aimed at managing the symptoms rather than treating the infection itself.
- Get lots of rest and keep drinking fluids to stay hydrated.
- Here are a few of the over-the-counter medications you can try at home:
  - Medications containing pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine help reduce swelling in the nose and help to reduce congestion. When these medications are combined with antihistamines, such as loratadine, they can also help with cough.
  - Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen or naproxen, help reduce headache and general aches and pains, as well as reduce sneezing.

How do we stop spreading it?
- These bugs live in the secretions in our noses so it is easily spread by coughing, sneezing, and blowing your nose.
- If you need to sneeze or cough:
  - First, try to move away from others that are around you so that you don’t spread your germs.
  - Second, sneeze or cough into a tissue (that you then throw away) or sneeze into your elbow or upper arm like the pictures below:
Hand washing! These viruses also live on our hands and practicing good hand hygiene can help prevent their spread.

- Wash hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Both antibacterial and non-antibacterial soaps are protective against colds.
- Benzalkonium chloride-based hand sanitizers that foam and leave a residue have been found to be beneficial, but alcohol hand sanitizers are less effective.

If you have unwashed hands, try not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth because these are areas that viruses could enter and make you sick.

- Try to avoid people that are sick. If you are sick, avoid hugging or shaking hands.