



## FACTSHEET

# Most chest infections don't need antibiotics

Contrary to the name, most 'chest infections' are in fact **VIRAL BRONCHITIS** - **so will not respond to antibiotics.** (Antibiotics are active against *bacterial* infections).

### KEY FACTS

- Viral bronchitis in otherwise well adults will generally clear up without treatment in around 21 days
- Green sputum does not mean antibiotics are required
- If in doubt – ask if antibiotics are really needed (you could do this via our e-Consult service – see the home page of our website [www.wilsonpractice.co.uk](http://www.wilsonpractice.co.uk))
- If you don't need antibiotics, it's likely that you will recover just as fast but without the side effects, such as a rash, sickness or diarrhoea that can be associated with antibiotics
- You can get advice and symptom relief preparations from a pharmacy

### THE DETAILS

#### Viral bronchitis means...

- Antibiotics are not appropriate treatment: they do not kill viruses
- It will clear up without treatment in 3 -4 weeks

#### Most viral illnesses go through phases

- Phase 1 is often one or more of:
  - sore throat
  - runny nose
  - blocked nose
- Phase 2 (after several days – when Phase 1 has subsided):
  - cough (this lasts around 21 days (yes, three weeks!) – sometimes longer
  - with or without green sputum

These are part of the normal course of the illness, not a sign that it has 'gone to your chest'. Antibiotics will not help: it is all part of your body's reaction to the virus.

#### How do GPs and nurse prescribers decide if antibiotics ARE needed?

They consider the total clinical picture:

- age of patient (old or very young)
- pre-existing disease such as COPD or diabetes that mean a chest infection is more likely
- clinical findings, including rapid breathing, fever or abnormal sounds in the chest

For advice about **chest infections in children and young people**, the Wessex Healthier Together website, <https://what0-18.nhs.uk/> has a wealth of useful information backed by GPs and health visitors.