

## VIRAL INFECTIONS OF THE RESPIRATORY TRACT

### 375 THE COMMON COLD

*J. Owen Hendley*

**DEFINITION.** The common cold, also known as an upper respiratory infection (URI) or acute coryza, is an acute, self-limited illness caused by a virus. Nasal symptoms including rhinorrhea and nasal obstruction are invariably present; sore/scratchy throat and/or cough may be present. Many myths surround the source of the virus causing colds. There are no normal viral flora of the respiratory tract in humans (two possible exceptions are human herpesvirus type 6 in saliva and adenovirus, which can be recovered from adenoid tissue of otherwise healthy children by co-cultivation with susceptible cells). In sharp contrast, luxuriant normal bacterial flora occur in the upper respiratory tract and mouth. Because viruses are not part of normal flora, the viruses that cause colds are not present in the host ready to be activated because "resistance" has been lowered by chilling, loss of sleep, or bad diet. Instead, the virus must be *passed* from another human to produce the cold.

Because the subjective symptoms of a cold disappear in 7 days without intervention, a variety of actually ineffective treatments have been reported to be effective due to inadequate blinding of placebo recipients. One example of this phenomenon was a study of large doses of vitamin C to prevent colds, in which many placebo recipients dropped out of the study because they could tell by tasting the medication that they were not receiving the vitamin C. Another example was the use of zinc gluconate lozenges as an antiviral treatment for colds. In the blinded trial, the only appropriate placebo that could be found to match the noxious taste of the zinc was denatonium benzoate, which is so bitter that it has been painted on the thumbs of children to discourage them from thumb-sucking.

**CECIL**

# ***T*EXTBOOK *of* **MEDICINE****

EDITED BY:

**Lee Goldman, M.D.**

Julius Krevans Distinguished Professor and Chairman  
Department of Medicine  
Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs  
University of California, San Francisco  
School of Medicine  
San Francisco, California

**J. Claude Bennett, M.D.**

Distinguished University Professor Emeritus  
University of Alabama at Birmingham  
Formerly President, Spencer Professor of Medicine, and  
Chairman, Department of Medicine  
University of Alabama at Birmingham  
Birmingham, Alabama



**21<sup>st</sup>  
Edition**

**W.B. SAUNDERS COMPANY**

*A Harcourt Health Sciences Company*

Philadelphia ■ London ■ New York ■ St. Louis ■ Sydney ■ Toronto

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Cecil textbook of medicine/edited by Lee Goldman, J. Claude Bennett.—21st ed.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7216-7995-1

1. Internal medicine. I. Cecil, Russell L. (Russell La Fayette), 1881-1965.  
II. Goldman, Lee, MD. III. Title: Textbook of medicine. [DNLM: 1.  
Medicine. WB 100 C3888 2000]

RC46.C423 2000 616—dc21

DNLM/DLC

98-52751