

Viral Infections of the Respiratory Tract

325/326. THE COMMON COLD*

Albert Z. Kapikian

DEFINITION. Although the term "common cold" does not denote a precisely defined disease, it has an almost universally comprehended meaning of an acute self-limited common illness of all age groups, in which the major clinical manifestations involve the upper respiratory tract, with nasal discharge (coryza) or nasal obstruction as the predominant symptom.

HISTORY. Although it was known since 1914 that bacteria-

Antibiotics have no value in the therapy of the uncomplicated common cold. Previous tonsillectomy did not significantly affect the number of common respiratory illnesses or the induction of experimental colds in volunteers in the Cleveland Family Study. The use of vitamin C for the treatment or prevention of common colds has aroused great interest and much controversy. Available evidence indicates that its use does not reduce the number of episodes of respiratory illness but does decrease somewhat the total number of days of disability. The routine use of large doses of vitamin C for preventive treatment of common colds does not appear to be warranted from evidence available at this time.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION. There is no specific treatment for patients with the common cold. Only symptomatic treat-

Dykes MHM, Meier P: Ascorbic acid and the common cold. JAMA 231:1073, 1975. *A thoughtful and careful analysis of numerous studies on the efficacy and safety of ascorbic acid in the prevention and treatment of the common cold. The authors conclude that "the unrestrictive use of ascorbic acid for these purposes cannot be advocated on the basis of the evidence currently available."*

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