What is it?
Infections of the upper respiratory tract are the most common illness in the general population, as well as in athletes. The throat and/or the sinuses may be infected. The “common cold” and “strep throat” are considered URIs. Other names include “pharyngitis,” “sinusitis,” or “rhinitis.”

Risk Factors
- Contact with other people who are sick
- Poor hygiene
- Sleep deprivation
- Over-training
- Smoking

Symptoms
- Cough
- Nasal congestion
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches
- Possibly fever

Sports Medicine Evaluation and Treatment
Diagnosis is usually made by the history of the illness and duration of symptoms. A test for “strep throat,” influenza, or for infectious mononucleosis (“mono”) may be obtained if the suspicion is high enough for these infections.

Treatment options include:
- Hydration
- Sleep
- Symptomatic treatment – decongestant, cough suppressant
- Analgesics (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) for headache, sore throat, muscle aches
- In the case of bacterial infection, antibiotics

Injury Prevention
Athletes should wash their hands. Their mouths should be covered when coughing and they should avoid others who are sick, if possible. They should not drink using the same glass or container just used by those who are sick. Athletes should consider getting annual flu shots to prevent true influenza.

Return to Play
Athletes should not practice or compete while they have a fever. In most situations, athletes can practice when they are feeling well enough to do so. In general, if an athlete is having symptoms below the neck, such as chills or body aches, return to play is not yet recommended. If athletes have mononucleosis, different return to play guidelines exist.

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References