



**HERBAL  
ANTIVIRALS**  
*for Boosting  
Immunity*

Sorrel Davis

live  
**healthy**  
now!



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# Understanding Viruses

Viruses, believed to be the most abundant biological entities on Earth, are microscopic organisms that replicate inside the cells of living hosts, including humans and other animals, plants, and bacteria. Viral infections begin when proteins on the surface of a virus particle, known as a virion (a complete virus particle that is the extracellular infective form of a virus), bind to specific receptor proteins on the surface of host cells. The distribution of these receptor molecules on host cells determines the cell preference of the virus. For example, a cold or flu virus will target cells that line the respiratory tract (airway and lungs), and a foodborne virus will target cells in the digestive tract (stomach and colon). The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) specifically attacks T lymphocytes (T cells), which are white blood cells that fight infection and disease and are a vital component of a healthy immune system.

## Viral Transmission

Viruses cannot exist on their own, so in order to survive they need to spread to another host. This may be necessary because the original host has either died or eliminated the infection. Some important routes of viral transfer include the following:

- Animal bites (rabies)
- Fecal-oral (coxsackievirus, hepatitis A, polio, rotavirus)
- Insects (dengue virus, yellow fever)
- Respiratory (cold viruses, influenza viruses, measles, mumps, rubella)
- Sexually (hepatitis A, herpes 1 and 2, human papillomavirus/HPV, human immunodeficiency virus/HIV)
- Skin contact (HPV/warts)
- Transplacental (cytomegalovirus, HIV, rubella)

In order to spread, viruses must survive the immune system of their hosts. There is a special category of viruses called opportunists that cause disease only when the host's immune system is deficient in some way, such as with acquired

immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Some viruses can induce chronic infection. This occurs when a virus replicates over the entire remaining life of the host, regardless of the host's defense mechanisms, as with hepatitis B and hepatitis C infections. Individuals with chronic infections are considered carriers, and they will be reservoirs of the infectious virus as long as they live. In regional populations with a high percentage of carriers, the disease is deemed endemic.

Viral transmission may be vertical (from mother to child) or horizontal (from individual to individual). Horizontal infection, the most common means of viral propagation, can take place through the exchange of blood (as with a transfusion), the exchange of body fluid (as with sexual activity), or the exchange of saliva (as with kissing or shared eating utensils). Additionally, horizontal infection can occur via contaminated food or water, respiration of viruses dispersed in air or gases, or through animal or insect vectors, such as mosquitoes. How quickly a viral disease spreads depends on a number of factors, most significantly population density and sanitation.

# Common Human Diseases Caused by Viruses

The spread or outbreak of a viral infection in a community is termed an epidemic. A pandemic occurs when there is a worldwide epidemic. The 1918 Spanish flu outbreak was such a pandemic. It was caused by an unusually severe and deadly influenza A virus. Most of the victims were healthy young adults, in contrast to the immunocompromised and elderly individuals who are the more typical targets of epidemics. The Spanish flu killed around one hundred million people, or at least 5 percent of the world's population in 1918. Today HIV is considered pandemic, with an estimated thirty-nine million people now living with the disease worldwide.

There are many good reasons to be concerned about dangerous viruses and to take precautions against the ones that can do us harm. Here are just some of the many diseases viruses are responsible for in humans:

- Astrovirus
- Chickenpox
- Common cold
- Dengue fever
- Ebola
- Foodborne illness
- Hand, foot, and mouth disease
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Herpes
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- Human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Influenza
- Japanese encephalitis
- Measles
- Mumps
- Poliomyelitis

- Rabies
- Rubella
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)
- Shingles
- West Nile virus
- Zika virus

# Bacterial versus Viral Infections

People are often confused about the difference between viruses and bacteria. Bacteria are single-celled microorganisms that thrive in many different types of environments. Some varieties thrive in extreme cold or heat; others reside in our intestines, where they help digest food. Most bacteria are either beneficial or benign and cause us no harm. However, there are exceptions, of course. Some of the illnesses caused by bacteria include strep throat, tuberculosis, and urinary tract infections.

In some cases it may be hard to determine whether a bacterium or virus is the cause of symptoms. Many ailments, such as diarrhea, meningitis, and pneumonia, can be caused by either type of microbe. Also, both types are spread in similar ways: through the air (coughing and sneezing); contact with infected people (especially through kissing and sex); contact with contaminated surfaces, food, or water; and contact with infected creatures, including insects (such as fleas and ticks), household pets, and livestock. Moreover, either type of microbe can cause acute (short-lived) infections, chronic infections (those that last for weeks, months, or a lifetime), and latent infections (those that may not cause immediate symptoms but can reactivate over a period of months or years and cause symptoms later on).

Viral infections come with a host of symptoms ranging from mild to severe that may vary depending on the type of virus, the person's age and overall health, and which part of the body is affected. Symptoms of a viral infection may include any of the following:

## **Mild symptoms:**

- Chills
- Coughing
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Rash
- Runny nose

- Sneezing
- Vomiting
- Weakness

**More severe symptoms:**

- Back pain
- Confusion
- Dehydration
- Impaired bladder function
- Impaired bowel function
- Loss of sensation
- Neck stiffness
- Paralysis of the limbs
- Personality changes
- Seizures
- Sleepiness that can progress into coma or death

Because it's not always easy to determine whether an infection is bacterial or viral, antibiotics have frequently been prescribed to treat comparable symptoms, even though antibiotics are powerless against viruses. Overuse and inappropriate use of antibiotics has contributed to the creation of resistant and virulent bacterial strains that are invulnerable to different types of antibiotic medications.

Viral infections are difficult to treat because viruses live inside the body's cells, which "shield" them from medicines that usually move through the bloodstream. Antibiotics, which are effective against bacterial infections, don't work for viral infections, such as the common cold or flu. Over the past two decades, several medications that treat viral infections have been developed, but novel antiviral drugs are still in short supply. These medicines are more difficult to develop than antibacterial drugs because antivirals can damage host cells where the viruses reside. Currently there are more antiviral pharmaceuticals for HIV than for any other viral disease, and this has helped transform an infection that was once considered a death sentence into a manageable chronic condition. However, these drugs don't cure HIV infection; instead, they stop the virus from multiplying and prevent the progress of the disease. Although new drugs are

needed to combat other epidemic viral infections, viruses in general are notoriously difficult drug targets because they rapidly mutate and adapt themselves to develop resistance to the drugs used to combat them.

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