

MEDIA RELEASE

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Confusion over how long a cold should last could be causing thousands of unnecessary GP appointment's each winter

Research commissioned by PAGBⁱ has revealed that the nation is confused about how long a common cold should typically last and are worryingly still visiting their GP at the first sign of a sniffle.

The research discovered that 71% of people think that symptoms of a common cold should only be present for 3 – 6 daysⁱⁱ and one fifth claim they would visit the GP for cold and flu symptoms after 7 days or lessⁱⁱⁱ. NHS Choices recommends only seeing your GP if symptoms of a cold persist for more than three weeks, or if you are having complications such as breathing difficulties, chest pain or coughing up bloodstained mucus^{iv} – this confusion could be causing thousands of unnecessary doctors' appointments each year and putting additional strain on NHS services.

One of the most common reasons people (36%) visit the GP when suffering with self-treatable winter conditions is because they want or think they need antibiotics^v. However, antibiotics don't have any impact on upper respiratory tract infections which are caused by viruses. A further 7% also visit their doctor to get recommendations on the medicines they should take to treat their symptoms, advice they can easily obtain from a pharmacist^{vi}. Over a third of people (37%) also admitted that they never use their pharmacist as a source of health information^{vii}.

John Smith, PAGB Chief Executive, said: "Too many people are still unsure on how long symptoms of self-treatable conditions such as colds should last for and don't know how to effectively manage the symptoms themselves without visiting their GP. On average, over an hour a day of every GP's time is spent discussing self-treatable conditions^{viii}, such as coughs and colds, even though people are advised to not to see their GP unless symptoms are still present after 3 weeks.

"The pharmacy should be the first port of call for people who are looking for advice on how they can manage minor ailments. Pharmacists are highly trained healthcare professionals and will be able to recommend the appropriate treatment based on the individuals symptoms and lifestyle choices, or advise you to see GP if they think it's necessary."

- ENDS -

Notes to editors:

PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain) is the UK trade association representing manufacturers of branded over-the-counter medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements.

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ⁱ Conducted by Redshift Research in September 2015 with a base of 2,000 people from the UK general population

ⁱⁱ How long do you think a common cold should typically last? 1-2 days: 8%, 3-4 days: 40%, 5-6 days: 31%, 7-10 days: 17%, 11-13 days: 2%, 2 weeks: 2%, 3 weeks: 0%, 4-6 weeks: 0%, Longer: 1%

ⁱⁱⁱ If you experience cold/flu symptoms, how long would you wait before visiting a GP? 1-2days: 3%, 3-4 days: 7%, 5-6 days: 11%, 7-10 days: 13%, 11-13 days: 6%, 2 weeks: 9%, 3 weeks: 3%, 4-6 weeks: 2%, wouldn't plan to visit: 46%

^{iv} <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Cold-common/Pages/Introduction.aspx> (date accessed 28th January 2016)

^v Millward Brown, Treat Yourself Better post-campaign consumer research results, April 2015, What were your reasons for seeking consultation with a doctor when you last experienced cold or flu symptoms? 36% (of those respondents unaware of the Treat Yourself Better campaign)

^{vi} Why do you visit a GP with a condition such as a cough or cold?: Don't go to the GP: 78%, Antibiotics: 8%, Prescription: 8%, Advice on medicine: 7%, Reassurance: 6%, sick note for work: 3%

^{vii} How much, if at all, do you use the following information to get information about your health?: % of people who said not at all to a pharmacist: 37%

^{viii} IMS Health, Minor ailment workload in General Practice, 2007