



# Cold Culture

**We all have different ways of dealing with a cold – but what does our Cold Culture look like in 2022 and beyond?**

Olbas provides a complete guide to the UK's Cold Culture, our behaviour and attitude towards winter ailments and what tricks and treatments have stood the test of time.

GP, Dr. Roger Henderson and Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Angharad Rudkin have provided expert tips and advice on this topic.

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**Introduction in collaboration with leading GP, Dr. Roger Henderson, and Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Angharad Rudkin.**

Dr. Roger Henderson;

“We are all used to having an occasional cold – in fact we can each expect to have at least two each year – and we expect to get better quite quickly from them. The Covid pandemic however has changed our behaviour in many ways including our attitudes towards health hygiene and how we work when we are feeling unwell.

“Recent studies suggest we are now more likely to stay away from our workplace if we have a cold than we did before the pandemic. This reflects in part our increased awareness of the best ways to get back to full health, as well as an increased concern about passing an



infection on to other people – with Covid lockdowns being the prime example here.

“We may also be less likely to catch a simple viral infection such as a cold because of a greater level of hand washing, a greater awareness of coughs and sneezes in spreading infections, and generally improved health hygiene as a result of changing behaviour linked to the impact of Covid-19.”



Dr. Angharad Rudkin;

“We all had a bit of a fright when the pandemic arrived. The speed and the severity of risks and changes meant that the world as we knew was gone. We rely on familiarity and consistency to feel relaxed and well, and both things disappeared as we launched into hybrid work patterns, different ways of educating and new ways of socialising.

“As we emerge from the pandemic, it’s interesting to find out what continues to be different for us all. While we are all used to getting colds in winter, the meaning attached to them now can be different. Certainly, we seem to be more cautious



about being ill and catching an illness. The common cold is now something we question – is it a cold or is it covid? Should I go to work, or should I stay at home? These are the types of questions the research has thrown light on.”

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# Cold culture in a post-pandemic world

**An in depth look at the things people are more likely to do now to avoid catching a cold and how we care for colds, compared to before the start of the coronavirus pandemic.**

The pandemic has changed many aspects of our everyday life, creating a 'new normal'. The experience of lockdown, self-isolating, dealing with bouts of Covid-19 and living with all the safety precautions that were introduced, have made a lasting impact on our everyday life and particularly how we now deal with colds and flu post-pandemic.

The latest research from Olbas found that over two thirds of people take either a few or many more precautions to avoid catching a cold than they did before the pandemic. What was once thought of as

an inevitable part of winter, with children going to nursery or with us working in a busy office, catching a cold is now something that people actually try to avoid.

**68% of people take more measures now to prevent catching a cold than they did before the pandemic**

Our awareness of how easily we can catch and spread colds and viruses has hugely increased. The precautions we took during the pandemic, such as social distancing has changed the way we think about being in close contact with one another, particularly when unwell.



Since the pandemic, **over a third** of people (37%) avoid crowded places to prevent catching a cold

We are also now more aware of the importance of keeping our hands clean and away from mouths, noses and eyes.

A key pointer during the pandemic was the process of sneezing into your elbow to reduce the spread of Covid-19, avoiding using hands which can then spread germs more easily. Research shows that this new elbow technique is the second most popular way to catch a sneeze, after using a tissue and ahead of sneezing into hands.

**24%**



Nearly a quarter (24%) of people now use the crook of their elbow for sneezing



**Top ten actions we do to avoid catching a cold compared to pre-pandemic**

1. Avoiding crowded places
2. Keeping hands clean and away from mouth, eyes and nose
3. Avoid touching handrails
4. Not shaking hands
5. Increasing Vitamin C intake to support the immune system
6. Not kissing on the cheek when meeting friends
7. Increasing Vitamin D intake
8. Drinking plenty of fluids
9. Avoid sharing utensils and glasses
10. Disinfecting mobile phones



# Feeling under the weather

**A dive into what happens and our behaviour when we are ill. At what stage do we take time off work and how long on average do we take off vs working through, but from home, in our new hybrid world.**

Our approach to colds and how much they affect our ability to work has always caused a divide with many thinking you should 'soldier on' and keep working as it is 'just' a cold. In 2020, as we went in and out of lockdown and the workplace, we were told to stop soldiering on and in fact take more sick days to protect others.



As common colds are just that, common, how people choose to deal with them and their approach to work as a result is a very personal choice, and with today's blurred lines around place of work, the option of working from home when you're not feeling too well could mean people aren't taking days off when rest is much needed, meaning colds could last longer.

**33% think people are more likely to stay away from the workplace at the first sign of a cold then they were pre-pandemic**

There is more of an awareness about the impact of our illness on other people as a result of the pandemic. Not only the impact we have on work colleagues, friends and family, but also those around us that may be more vulnerable or susceptible to illness.

Despite people thinking that others would stay away from the workplace with a cold, 4% said that they would still go into their place of work with symptoms of a cold, showing that the 'soldiering on' approach still remains in today's society.

**41%**

would still struggle into their workplace when suffering from a cold





The new 'working from home' culture means that people are more likely to carry on working with a cold when perhaps they should be resting.

The Olbas research found that nearly a third of those asked would choose to work from home with a cold, as remote working is now accepted and promoted by many businesses, but this does mean that many people might be working when they should be having a day off to get well.

Overall,

**30%** 

would work from home if they were suffering from a cold

“54% said they were more or much more likely to stay away from work if they had a cold, compared to before the pandemic.”



**Considering the findings and people's approach to work when they have a cold, Dr. Rudkin explained;**

“Just as no one is the same physically, we are all different psychologically too. Some people have very high tolerance for discomfort and distress, others have lower tolerance. When it comes to coping with a cold, we all have our different ways of thinking and dealing with it. These ways are usually related to our childhood and how our colds and coughs then were managed. Having a cold is a universal experience but how we deal with it is a more personal issue.

“Making the judgement about whether to call in sick or not is related to the physical symptoms we are dealing with but is also linked to how you think about work and how you think about yourself. If you are someone who has a strong sense of social responsibility your worry about letting others down may contribute to you ploughing on at work. In this study, 40% said they would struggle into work with a cold, with 38% of respondents saying they had no time off work for a cold. If you are someone who worries about being ill and how it will

affect you, then you may be more likely to take time off work to recover from a cold. “Calling in sick or not has now been complicated by hybrid working patterns. Many jobs now involve working from home as well as being in a place of work. This has affected the way decisions are made about whether to work with a cold. Findings show that 30% of respondents would try to work from home rather than go into the office. This blurring of boundaries between being off with a cold and working with a cold, is a new phenomenon since the pandemic.

“Even though colds and Covid are two different things, the overlap in symptoms means we are more likely to associate the two in our thinking. We are all far more aware of the ease with which an illness can be spread, so have become more cautious about how we act when we are ill. In this survey, 54% said they were more or much more likely to stay away from work if they had a cold, compared to before the pandemic. The sense of community and our role in protecting others has become more prominent since the pandemic, and this sense of responsibility to others as well as ourselves may well be influencing our choices when we have a cold.”



Most people

**78%**

would take 2-3 days off work with a cold



The average amount of time that people would take off work when suffering from a cold is two days with nearly half of those asked (44%) confirming this, a further 34% said they would take three days off work.



**A fifth** of people believe they catch colds from the workplace



The place where people think they catch their colds is commuting or travelling with 36% confirming this, however a further 20% feel they that we are most likely to catch a cold in the workplace.

**More than half (51%) say their employer has not encouraged them to stay away at the first sign of a cold since easing of coronavirus restrictions.**

It seems there a clear split in terms of employers' approach to colds since returning to the workplace, with just over half of those asked felt their employer hasn't actively encouraged them to stay away at the sign of a cold. This indicates many are taking a business-as-usual approach to work while others may still be cautious about the spread of germs in the workplace.



**Dr. Henderson gives his medical opinion on working with a cold;**

"If you have a cold and feel very unwell, your symptoms mean it's unlikely that you're going to be productive at work and it's better to go off sick and work from home if you're able to - this also means you're not spreading your germs around the workplace. This gives you the chance to rest and allow your body to recover, as working hard or exerting yourself when you're unwell with a cold can make you feel worse and slow down your recovery. Colds rapidly spread in an office environment, especially if people work close to each other or if there is little natural ventilation in an office to allow fresh air to circulate.

"As a result of the pandemic people now appear to be more cautious in their approach to coming into work when unwell and are more likely to take a few days out of the office and work from home instead until they feel better. If someone is the main earner in a family, they may be more likely to carry on working with a cold as a result, or if the person responsible for childcare has a cold and their children do too, they may be more likely to take time out in order to both get themselves better quickly and look after their children at the same time."





# Red nosed and red faced

**What are the things people find most difficult to live with when they have a cold, and what symptoms do people find most embarrassing - including expert insight from Dr. Angharad Rudkin to explain these behaviours.**

The symptoms of a cold can range from sniffles and coughing through to loss of taste or smell, headaches and sneezing. Whilst the symptoms experienced with a cold haven't really changed over the years, how we feel towards them has shifted since 2020.

**The same four symptoms of a cold are still most difficult to live with both pre- and post-pandemic**

A runny nose, cough, sore throat and a blocked nose are the four symptoms of a cold that people find most difficult to deal with, this is unchanged by the pandemic. It is the physical symptoms that people struggle with more so than internal symptoms like headaches and loss of taste.

**A cough is the most embarrassing symptom of colds following the pandemic**

Over half of those surveyed (53%) state coughing as the most embarrassing symptom of a cold, however before the pandemic it was a runny nose that people cited as the most embarrassing symptom. It appears that the pandemic has changed the way people feel towards coughing and the stigma associated with it. Before the pandemic, the majority (44%) of people felt constantly tending to a runny nose caused embarrassment in public however the implications associated with coughing and its links to Covid-19 means we now don't feel comfortable coughing in front of others.



**Nearly a third**

of people (28%) turn to either sleep or a decongestant to mitigate the symptoms of a cold

Understanding how to support our bodies to fight off a cold is key to reducing its length and minimising the effects of the symptoms. Giving your immune system a boost can help to fight off a cold and sleep allows your body to focus on recovery. Using a decongestant to help ease congestion can support better sleep and therefore a speedier recovery.



**Dr Henderson explains how symptoms affect people when they have a cold;**

“There is a range of physical symptoms associated with a cold, some more or less difficult to live with. The symptoms that appear to be the hardest to live with are a blocked or runny nose, coughing and a sore throat, all of which have a physical appearance or discomfort and affect our breathing, making social interactions more uncomfortable both physically and emotionally.”

**Dr. Rudkin discusses behaviours associated with a cold;**

“When asked about the most embarrassing symptoms, unsurprisingly the same kind of symptoms were rated highly - coughing, runny nose and also

sneezing. Compared to the more internal symptoms of a cold such as headaches, earaches and fever, these external symptoms are very hard to hide or cover up. Findings suggest that some symptoms are more embarrassing now than they were before the pandemic.

“For example, 40% of respondents said they found coughing embarrassing pre-pandemic, but this rises to 53% of people saying they are embarrassed about coughing post-pandemic. It appears that the meaning of coughs has changed for us all – from a relatively benign symptom to something potentially deadly. Our sensitivity to this means that having a cough is now a little more embarrassing as we fear it will make people evaluate us negatively and not want to be around us.”



**Decongestants**

Helps to decongest and ease symptoms of a blocked nose



**Paracetamol or Ibuprofen**

Will help relieve any aches and pains and lower body temperature if you have a fever



**Cold & Flu tablets**

Often contain paracetamol and decongestants to relieve a wider array of symptoms including headaches, aches and pains, blocked noses and more...

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# Regional resistance

**An analysis of cold culture across the UK and how different regions fared in the survey – comments from Dr. Roger Henderson.**

When looking at the data regionally, there are some really interesting findings relating to how different regions fare when suffering with a cold and how often people living in different cities are catching colds.

**Londoners are more likely to catch a cold than any other city in the UK**

With an average of five colds per year, people living in London catch more colds than anywhere else in the UK.

Given the population size and the fact many commute on public transport, it is not surprising that there are more incidents of colds in the capital.

**Birmingham, Brighton and London are the cities that take the most time off work when suffering from a cold**

Peaking at between 3-4 days off work when suffering from a cold, these three cities are perhaps doing the right thing in taking the time to rest and recover, which could in turn mean shorter overall bouts and quicker recover from a cold.



**Dr. Henderson considers the regional differences when dealing with a cold;**

“This survey has highlighted differences across the UK in how people in certain areas are affected by colds and how frequently they have one. In general, it appears that the more populated the area, the greater the likelihood of people in that region catching a cold – for example people in densely populated London catch the most colds whereas further north this occurs less commonly, catching only one or two a year.

“This is likely to be due to the greater risk of a cold being transmitted in densely populated areas where people are more likely to be in close contact – such as on tube trains, offices or buses for example – whereas in regions with smaller populations, reduced close contact can help decrease the transmission of colds from person to person.

“The survey also found that the usual maximum number of days people take off sick if they have a cold is two to three across the UK. Areas that were heavily impacted by Covid-19 may have slightly altered their cold hygiene behaviour as a result – such as by increasing hand washing and being less likely to come into work when unwell – compared to areas less impacted.”

**How do different UK cities fare when it comes to coping with a cold**







# Mythbusting

There are many myths surrounding colds and how to treat them. Olbas expert Dr. Roger Henderson dispels some of the most well-known myths associated with colds.

**❓ MYTH:** Antibiotics are the only way to treat a cold.

**✅ FACT:** Antibiotics are only suitable for the treatment of bacterial infections and do not work on viruses such as those that cause colds. You will only be prescribed antibiotics if the cold turns into a secondary infection such as bronchitis.

**❓ MYTH:** You catch a cold from someone sneezing on you.

**✅ FACT:** You're more likely to be infected with a cold by touching a door handle, tea towel, or a handrail on the bus that's been contaminated by the virus. Shaking hands can also pass on germs and once your fingers have been contaminated and you rub your eyes or nose, the virus will invade your body. However, you can become ill if you breathe in droplets containing a cold virus that have been sneezed or coughed into the air.



**❓ MYTH:** Feed a cold, starve a fever.

**✅ FACT:** Never starve yourself! Nutritious hot drinks and soups (rather than solids) are what you need.

**❓ MYTH:** If you go out with wet hair, you'll catch a cold.

**✅ FACT:** It is now thought that you may actually be able to catch a cold by getting cold. When we shiver, our whole body becomes quite stressed, which depresses the immune system. We have bugs in our nose all the time, and when the immune system drops its guard, these seize their chance.

**❓ MYTH:** You can catch the same cold twice.

**✅ FACT:** There are around 200 cold viruses, and on average, we catch a couple each winter. However, once the cold ends, your body has built up immunity which will protect you from catching the same virus again.

In general, the best ways to treat a simple cold are to rest and get plenty of sleep, drink lots of water to stay well hydrated and ease aches and pains or a high temperature by taking paracetamol or ibuprofen (check with your doctor or pharmacist that you can safely take these). Eating a healthy diet with lots of fruit and vegetables will help if your appetite hasn't been affected and there should be no need to take supplements or vitamins to try to get better more quickly as there's little good evidence that this helps. If you have a high temperature or you don't feel well enough to do your normal activities, try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people until you feel better.





### Top tips to treat blocked noses

Fortunately, most common causes of a blocked nose (such as a cold) get better on their own without treatment. Top tips to help unblock a stuffy nose include;



**1. Steam inhalations** - breathing in warm moist air (such as steam from a shower) through the nose can help to soothe inflamed nasal tissue and can help thin out nasal mucus making it less thick and easier to clear.



**2. Using menthol-based products** - ingredients such as menthol or eucalyptus oil can help ease nasal congestion. Adding just a few drops on a handkerchief or putting in a bowl of hot water before inhaling can help to clear a blocked nose.



**3. Decongestant drops and sprays for the nose** can also be very effective in treating a blocked nose but should only be used for a maximum of 5-7 days as if they are used for longer than this you may have a 'rebound' blocked nose when you stop them. If symptoms worsen or do not improve after 7 days, a doctor should be contacted.



**4. Staying well hydrated** helps to thin out nasal mucus and eating a lot of dairy products can sometimes cause mucus to thicken up so reducing consumption of these can sometimes help too.



**5. When sleeping, using an extra pillow to prop your head up** often helps as does keeping the bedroom cool and using a humidifier in it. Before going to bed, using a warm compress such as a towel soaked in warm water then squeezed out and placed over your nose and forehead can also help reduce nasal inflammation overnight.



**Dr. Henderson comments;**

“Because our health behaviour changed so much during the Covid pandemic, the numbers of people having cold and flu infections over this time fell considerably. This also meant that many people were not being exposed to the usual cold viruses experienced every year, and so our immune systems were not being challenged or fighting off the common cold as normal.

“This means that as we are exposed to normal levels of colds once more, our body defences may not be able to protect ourselves as well as normal this winter and so we may experience a more severe cold season this year. However, compared to before the pandemic many people are now more observant about practising good health hygiene such as washing their hands regularly and avoiding close contact with people who have a cold. It may now be the case that we experience fewer rather than more colds overall as a result.”



**Dr. Rudkin concludes;**

“Our lives were turned upside down with the pandemic, and it is unlikely that we will ever return to lives the same as they were. We are living with a “new normal” where our beliefs about ourselves, our health and our social responsibilities have changed. Having a cold now brings with it the question of “could this be Covid?”, and worry about the consequences if it was. When someone sitting next to us starts coughing, it is likely that we will quickly wonder “do they have Covid?”, and we will shuffle away from them ever so slightly.

“This has all meant that we now take more measures to avoid a cold than before Covid, with 69% of respondents agreeing with this. The main protective strategies are to avoid crowded places, clean our hands more and not touch communal objects like handrails. We are also more cautious about kissing someone else in

greeting. While we have all had to redefine what it is we need to do to stay safe and healthy, inevitably these strategies will have a knock-on effect on our social lives, our beliefs in our health, strength and what choices we make around being with others who have a cold.

“Knowing how to look after ourselves and others when we have colds will be an important part of our emergence from the pandemic. Having a realistic appraisal of cold symptoms and our body’s defence against them will influence how we think about colds and how we behave around them in the future. Research has established a strong link between stress and our immune system. Staying calm, compassionate and realistic when we have a cold means that we are less likely to become stressed about them. Colds are not going away, but the way we think about them and deal with them will determine whether they can blight our winters or just be a passing part of life.”



# Conclusion

Claire Campbell, Brand Manager for Olbas says: "We wanted to understand what Cold Culture looks like today, and it is clear from these results there has been a shift in attitudes when it comes to the common cold because of the pandemic.

"As a result, many of us are being much more vigilant and proactive with their actions. But ultimately there is an air of inevitability surrounding catching a cold, and when it strikes it is often the home comforts people rely on to make themselves feel better".

However you cope with a cold, Olbas is here to help keep your noses clear all year round, while caring for the senses of every generation.

For congestion. Olbas for Children from 3 months. Always read the label.

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## About Olbas

For generations, Olbas has been providing a range of winter remedies that are suitable for the whole family to combat the symptoms of the common cold and flu, helping you breathe with ease.

**Olbas Oil** is the nation's favourite decongestant oil<sup>1</sup>, due to its powerful natural decongestant vapours that can help clear even the most stubborn of blocked noses when suffering from a cold. Olbas Oil is a special mixture of pure plant oils such as eucalyptus, mint, clove, juniperberry and cajuput. By simply adding just a few drops to a tissue, handkerchief or hot water and inhaling, the distinctive soothing and relieving vapours help unblock a stuffy, congested nose.

**Olbas for Children** is a gentle yet effective decongestant oil for infants over three months, helping relieve congestion and catarrh to restore easy breathing for the smallest of noses. Adding four drops to a tissue or hanky and holding close to the nose allows the child to breathe in the vapours, bringing them soothing and effective congestion relief both day and night.

**Olbas Nasal Spray** is a fast-acting, on-the-go clinically proven to not just help unblock nasal passages but also help to prevent the spread. With a special formula combined with natural essential oils that include eucalyptus, niaouli, refreshing mint extract and mineral-rich hypertonic seawater this quick relief nasal spray is suitable for adults and children aged 6 years and over.

**Olbas Bath** is a soothing and fragrant bath liquid that can be added to a warm bubble bath to help open your airways and ease tired, aching muscles. Sink into those soothing, Olbas vapours and let the steam help your congestion and stuffiness drift away.

**Olbas Inhaler** is a handy little decongestant stick that relieves congestion from a blocked nose, any time. Whether at work, the shop, or a friend's house, its compact format means it's easy to pop in a pocket or bag for instant on-the-go relief.

**Olbas Menthol Pastilles** are packed full of essential oils plus menthol to help maintain nasal flow. Pop a packet in your pocket for the soothing, slow release of natural vapours anytime, anywhere.



<sup>1</sup> IRI Cold & Flu Decongestants, Volume Sales, 52 w/e 01 Oct, 22, Total Market. To verify, please contact [info@laneshealth.com](mailto:info@laneshealth.com)

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The Olbas Cold Culture Report is based on insights and consumer perceptions from a survey of 2,000 British adults commissioned by Olbas and OnePoll, October 2022.