Cough reference guide

Canadian-first source map for patient education and clinician conversation.

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General health information only. This guide does not diagnose a condition or replace an assessment by a qualified clinician.

How to use this guide

Canadian patient resources and the CMAJ postinfectious-cough article anchor the page. Ontario Health, BTS, NICE, NHS, CDC, ATS and CHEST provide comparison and supplementary guidance. Current clinical judgment takes priority over any single source.

Clinical themes

- A cough is a symptom; duration and character organize assessment.
- Common causes include infection, post-infectious cough, asthma, COPD, upper-airway disease, reflux, medication effects and irritants.
- Children need paediatric-specific algorithms and age-appropriate testing.
- Antibiotics, inhalers, acid suppression and cough suppressants are not automatically appropriate.
- Red flags and changing symptoms should prompt reassessment.

Copyright and reuse

This original guide links to third-party sources and paraphrases educational themes. It does not reproduce third-party text, tables, figures or logos. Source owners' terms remain in force.

Sources and limitations

Canadian sources are listed first. U.S., U.K. and academic sources supplement the Canadian context. Links were opened and verified on 20 November 2026. This guide uses original wording and does not reproduce third-party text.

Lung Health Foundation — chronic cough: https://www.lung.ca/lung-diseases/chronic-cough/

Lung Health Foundation — causes of chronic cough: https://www.lung.ca/lung-diseases/chronic-cough/causes-of-chronic-cough/

HealthLink BC — coughs age 12 and older: https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/coughs-age-12-and-older

Government of Canada — respiratory infectious diseases: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/respiratory-infectious-diseases-reduce-spread-personal-protective-measures.html

Canadian Paediatric Society — croup: https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/acute-management-of-croup

Choosing Wisely Canada — paediatrics: https://choosingwiselycanada.org/recommendation/paediatrics/

CMAJ — postinfectious cough in adults: https://www.cmaj.ca/content/cmaj/196/5/E157.full.pdf

Ontario Health — infectious diseases: https://www.ontariohealth.ca/clinical/infectious-diseases

British Thoracic Society — chronic cough: https://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk/clinical-resources/clinical-statements/cough-adults/

NICE NG120 — acute cough: https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng120/resources/cough-acute-antimicrobial-prescribing-pdf-66141652166341

NHS — cough: https://www.nhs.uk/symptoms/cough/

CDC — chest cold acute bronchitis: https://www.cdc.gov/acute-bronchitis/about/index.html

American Thoracic Society — cough: https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/PHSCough.pdf

CHEST — chronic cough in children: https://journal.chestnet.org/article/S0012369220303251/pdf

NCBI Bookshelf — cough evaluation and management: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK493221/