Acute Bronchitis

What is acute bronchitis?
Acute bronchitis is an inflammation of the bronchial tree (airways). When these airways get infected, they swell and mucus is produced, making it harder for you to breathe.

What causes acute bronchitis?
Acute bronchitis is almost always caused by viruses that attack the lining of the airways and cause infection. As your body fights back, more swelling and mucus production occurs. In most cases, the same viruses that cause colds cause acute bronchitis.

How is acute bronchitis contracted?
The viruses that cause acute bronchitis are sprayed into the air or onto people’s hands when they cough. You can get acute bronchitis if you breathe in these viruses or touch a hand that has virus particles on it.

How is acute bronchitis treated?
Most cases of acute bronchitis will go away on their own after a few days or a week. Since the illness is most often caused by viruses, antibiotics usually do not help.

If you smoke, you should reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke or stop smoking altogether. This will help your airways heal faster. It is also important to drink plenty of fluids (especially water and juice) to help thin down the mucus and make it easier to clear out your airways.

For some cases of acute bronchitis, doctors prescribe medicines usually used to treat asthma.

How long will the cough from acute bronchitis last?
Sometimes the cough from acute bronchitis lasts for several weeks or months. If the virus is especially damaging, it can take this long for the airways to return to normal. However, a cough that doesn’t go away may be a sign of another problem, like asthma or pneumonia.

When should I call the Student Health Center?
• You develop a fever greater than 100° or have chills, body aches, or weakness.
• You have difficulty breathing.
• You continue to wheeze and cough, especially at night or when you are active.
• You cough up blood.

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