

Countable and uncountable nouns: special cases

The names of illnesses are usually uncountable in English. Examples are: *measles, flu, chickenpox* etc.

Measles is highly infectious. (NOT Measles are highly infectious.)

There is a lot of flu around at the moment.

The words for some minor ailments are countable. Examples are: *a cold, a sore throat, a headache* etc.

I have got a headache. (NOT I have got headache.)

In British English, some common ailments like *toothache, earache, stomach-ache* and *backache* are usually uncountable. In American English, they can be countable or uncountable.

I have got bad toothache. (GB)

I have got a bad toothache. / I have got bad toothache. (US)

Some uncountable nouns are plural. They have no singular forms with the same meaning and cannot be used with numbers. Examples are: *groceries, arms, remains, goods, clothes, customs, thanks, regards, police* etc.

Have you bought the groceries? (NOT Have you bought the grocery?) (NOT Have you bought a grocery?)

Thanks for your help. (NOT Thank for your help.)

Other plural uncountable nouns include *trousers, jeans, pajamas, pants, scissors, spectacles, glasses* etc.

The scissors are in the drawer. (The scissor is in the drawer.) (NOT The scissors is in the drawer.)

The expressions *the British, the English, the Spanish, the French, the Irish* etc are also plural.

The Irish are very proud of their sense of humor. (NOT The Irish is very proud ...)