

Your Child and The Common Cold

A cold is an infection of the upper airway (nose, throat, and sinuses) caused by a virus. Close to 200 viruses exist, so healthy children **may** have up to 15 colds a year. Most children under age five have 6-8 colds per year. Cold symptoms can last seven to fourteen days.

A cold virus is spread from a sick person to others by sneezing or coughing or contact with the hands or mouth. A cold virus can live on toys, phones, door knobs, tables, and other objects for up to three hours and transfer to a child's hands. The virus gets on a child's hands and is transferred to the nose, mouth, or eyes by normal face touching habits. Colds are not caused by being exposed to cold air or wind. Colds are more common in winter because people stay indoors and have more contact with each other.

Signs and Symptoms of a Cold

- Sneezing
- Cough
- Red eyes
- Irritability
- Sore throat
- Slightly swollen glands (lymph nodes)
- Runny nose (clear at first, then thicker and slightly colored)
- Decreased appetite
- Slight fever (100° – 102° F), most often in the evening

Infants are more prone to dehydration because of their small size and because it is hard for them to eat with a stuffy nose.

Signs of Dehydration

- Dry lips or mouth
- Decreased urination (less than 3 times in 24 hours)
- No tears with crying
- Eyes appear sunken and dark
- Sunken soft spot on top of infant's head
- General weakness

How to Prevent the Common Cold

Although you will not be able to prevent your child from catching colds, it is best to keep your child away from people who are sick. This is very important if your baby is younger than three months old. Keep your young baby away from shopping centers, day cares, churches and other places where there may a lot of people who could be sick.

Other tips that may help prevent the spread of a cold virus:

- Wash your hands and your child's hands often.
- Keep your child's hands away from the nose and mouth.
- Throw away used facial tissues right away.
- Teach your child to cover the nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing.
- Use a cool mist humidifier in your child's room to prevent drying of mucous membranes. When mucous membranes become dry, they are more at risk for infection.
- Be careful if using large doses of vitamin C. It has not been shown to prevent or shorten colds and may cause diarrhea.

How to Treat the Common Cold

There is no cure for colds. Antibiotics have no effect because they work against bacteria **not** viruses. There are some things you can do that will help your child to feel better.

- Make sure your child gets plenty of rest.
- Make sure your child gets plenty of fluids. Don't worry if your child doesn't want to eat solids.
- Use a cool mist humidifier in your child's room. Do not use warm or hot mist as it can cause burns and scalds in children. Clean the humidifier weekly with a mixture of bleach and water.
- Use a nasal bulb syringe for infants to clear mucus from the nose.
- If your child's nose is stuffed up but not dripping, use warm plain water or saline drops in the nose before using the bulb syringe.

How to Use Saline Drops

To make saline drops, add 1/4 teaspoon salt to 8 ounces warm water. Use an eye dropper or clean cotton ball to drip 2-4 drops into your child's nostrils. Let the drops stay in the nose for one minute and then use the bulb syringe. Repeat this process if needed.

Saline drops can be helpful for small babies before they eat because they breathe through their noses when they eat. When noses are stuffed up, it becomes hard for small babies to breathe while they are sucking and drinking. This is also a good thing to do before your child goes to sleep. You should make fresh saline drops daily.

Cough/Cold Medicines

The FDA strongly advises that you should not use over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold products for infants and children under six years of age.

Cough and cold products do not work well for children under six years of age and may pose health risks. They also can cause accidental poisoning in young children because they are colored and taste good.

If your child has pain, you may give acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen. Do **not** give your child aspirin. If you decide to give your older child cold medicine, be sure to read the label well. If the cold medicine contains acetaminophen, do not give your child extra Tylenol®. Follow all dose guidelines with care. Check with your clinic if you are unsure about doses.

When to Call

Call if your child:

- Is very sleepy or looks very ill.
- Is younger than 2-3 months of age and has a fever.
- Is over 3 months of age if the fever is 104° F or higher.
- Has had a fever of 101° F or higher for 72 hours (3 days) or longer.
- Has fast, labored breathing or has trouble breathing.
- Has a cough that lasts longer than two weeks.
- Has yellow drainage from the eyes.
- Has a sore throat without a runny nose or cough.
- Has ear or sinus pain.
- Has signs of dehydration.