

Colds (Age 6-21)

Definition

- The common cold is a viral infection of the nose and throat
- Main symptoms are a runny nose and sore throat
- Family members or close friends have same symptoms
- Medical names are viral rhinitis, upper respiratory infection, URI

Health Information

Symptoms

- Runny or stuffy nose. The nasal discharge may be clear, cloudy, yellow or green.
- A sore throat can be the first sign.
- Fever can also be present.
- At times, the child may also have a cough and hoarse voice. Sometimes, watery eyes and swollen lymph nodes in the neck also occur.

Cause

- Colds are caused by many respiratory viruses. Healthy children get about 6 colds a year.
- Colds are not serious. With a cold, about 5 and 10% of children develop an ear or sinus infection.

Colds: Symptoms of Secondary Bacterial Infections

Using this guide, you can decide if your child develops a complication. Look for these symptoms:

- Earache or ear discharge
- Sinus pain not relieved by nasal washes
- Trouble breathing or rapid breathing
- Fever lasts over 3 days
- Fever that goes away for 24 hours and then returns

Prevention of Spread to Others

- Cover the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often. After coughing or sneezing are important times.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- It's normal for healthy children to get at least 6 colds a year. With each new cold, your child's body builds up immunity to that virus.
- Most parents know when their child has a cold. Sometimes, they have it too or other children in school have it. Most often, you don't need to call or see your child's doctor.
- There are no drugs to make a cold go away sooner. But, there are good ways to help many of the symptoms. The treatment for each symptom is different.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. For a Runny Nose With Lots of Discharge: Blow the Nose

- The nasal mucus and discharge is washing germs out of the nose and sinuses.
- Blowing the nose is all that's needed.

3. **Nasal Saline To Open a Blocked Nose:**

- Use saline (salt water) nose drops or spray to loosen up the dried mucus. If you don't have saline, you can use a few drops of bottled water or clean tap water.
- STEP 1: Put 3 drops in each nostril.
- STEP 2: Blow each nostril out while closing off the other nostril.
- STEP 3: Repeat nose drops and blowing until the discharge is clear.
- How often: Do nasal saline when your child can't breathe through the nose.
- Saline nose drops or spray can be bought in any drugstore. No prescription is needed.
- Saline nose drops can also be made at home. Use 1/2 teaspoon (2 ml) of table salt. Stir the salt into 1 cup (8 ounces or 240 ml) of water. You must use bottled or boiled water for this purpose.
- Reason for nose drops: Blowing alone can't remove dried or sticky mucus.
- Other option. Use a warm shower to loosen mucus. Breathe in moist air, then blow each nostril.

4. **Fluids:**

- Try to get your child to drink lots of fluids.
- Goal: Keep your child well hydrated.
- It will thin out the mucus discharge from the nose. Also, it loosens up any phlegm in the lungs.

5. **Humidifier:**

- If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier. Reason: Dry air makes nasal mucus thicker.

6. **Medicines for Colds:**

- **Cold Medicines.** They are not advised. Reason: They can't remove dried mucus from the nose. Nasal saline works best.
- **Decongestants.** Decongestants by mouth (such as Sudafed) are not advised. Can have side effects.
- **Allergy Medicines.** They are not helpful, unless your child also has nasal allergies.
- **No Antibiotics.** Antibiotics are not helpful for viruses or colds. Antibiotics may be used if your child gets an ear or sinus infection.

7. **Fever:**

- For fevers above 102° F (39° C), give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. See a Dose Table. Note: Lower fevers are important for fighting infections.
- For ALL fevers: Keep your child well hydrated. Give lots of cold fluids.

8. **Treatment for Other Symptoms of Colds:**

- **Pain.** Use acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen for muscle aches or headaches.
- **Sore Throat.** Sip warm chicken broth. Some children prefer cold foods such as popsicles or ice cream. Can also suck on throat drops or hard candy.
- **Cough.** Can give honey 1 teaspoon (5 ml) for coughing spells. Can also use cough drops.

9. **What to Expect:**

- Fever can last 2-3 days
- Nasal drainage can last 7-14 days
- Cough can last 2-3 weeks

10. **Return to School:**

- Your child can go back to school after the fever is gone.
- Your child should also feel well enough to join in normal activities.

Call Your Doctor If

- Earache occurs
- Fever lasts more than 3 days
- Nasal discharge lasts more than 14 days
- Cough lasts more than 3 weeks
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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