

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

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

Copyright 2000-2022 Schmitt Pediatric Guidelines LLC

Disclaimer: This health information is for educational purposes only. You the reader assume full responsibility for how you choose to use it. The information contained in this handout should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. Listing of any resources does not imply an endorsement.