

Common Cold



If your child has a cold, then she probably has a virus. A cold virus causes an infection in the upper respiratory tract. This means it can affect your child's nose, throat and ears.

Children get more colds than adults because their immune systems aren't strong enough yet to protect them from these viruses. Because of this, your child may get colds up to 10 times a year. Also, children are in close contact with each other at daycares and schools, so it's easy for viruses to spread.

But there are steps you can take to help prevent colds and keep your child healthy.

Symptoms of a Cold

A cold virus gets into your child's body through her mouth, nose or eyes. Symptoms usually start two or three days after your child comes into contact with the virus. They may include:

- **runny or stuffy nose** (your child's mucus will probably change color and become thicker as the cold runs its course)
- **congestion**
- **sneezing**
- **watery eyes**
- **cough**
- **low fever** (up to 102°F in infants and young children)
- **itchy or sore throat**
- **feeling tired**
- **headache**
- **minor body aches**

Cold symptoms usually only last about a week, but they can stick around for as few as two days to as many as 14 days.

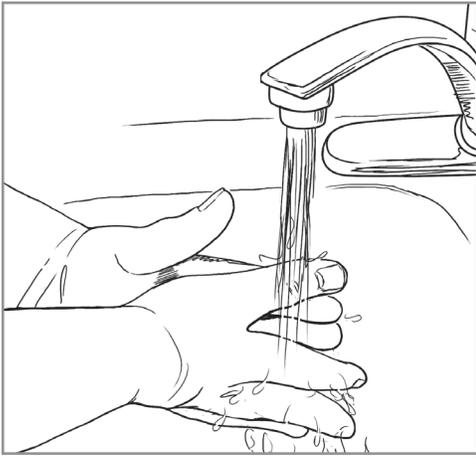
Treating a Cold

Colds usually get better on their own. Antibiotics won't work to treat colds because these medicines treat bacteria, and not viruses. You can buy over-the-counter (OTC) medicines to relieve symptoms and make your child feel better. But OTC cold and cough medicines should never be given to children under age 4. Always talk to your doctor about the best treatment options for your child.

If your doctor does suggest OTC medicine, read the label and follow the instructions for your child's age group (unless your doctor gives you other directions). Also, only give your child one type of medicine. Many cold medicines have the same ingredients, so giving your child multiple medicines could cause an overdose. To be safe, always check the list of ingredients before giving your child OTC medicines. Or ask a pharmacist for help choosing the right medicine for your child.

To help your child feel better during her cold, try these tips:

- **Give her lots of fluids to drink.** Water, juice, and warm chicken soup can help prevent dehydration and loosen congestion. But avoid drinks with caffeine.
- **Encourage your child to rest.** Resting will help her body fight the virus.
- **Use saline nasal drops to relieve congestion.** You can get these at your pharmacy. They're nonirritating and safe for children.



To learn more, visit
HealthyAdvice.com/Colds

You can also visit these
websites:

- **American Academy of Family Physicians**
www.familydoctor.org
- **American Academy of Pediatrics**
www.healthychildren.org
- **KidsHealth (Nemours Foundation)**
www.kidshealth.org

This *Healthy Advice*® handout may be reproduced for patient use and is provided courtesy of your doctor:

When to Call the Doctor

If your child's symptoms get worse after three days or aren't better after 10 days, call your doctor. Your child might have an infection in her lungs, sinuses or ears that's caused by bacteria. If her symptoms last longer than two weeks, they could be symptoms of other conditions, such as allergies, asthma or the flu.

Call your child's doctor if your child is experiencing any of these symptoms:

- **high fever** (above 102°F), or a fever that lasts more than one day
- **coughing up large amounts of mucus**
- **trouble breathing**
- **trouble keeping food or liquids down**
- **very painful sore throat**
- **chest or stomach pain**
- **swollen neck glands**
- **earache**

How to Prevent Colds from Spreading

If your child is sick, and she coughs, sneezes or talks, her germs can spread to another child through droplets in the air. The cold virus can also spread by hand-to-hand contact, or by using the same objects as someone who is sick, like silverware, towels, toys and telephones. If your child gets germs on her hands and then touches her face, she could easily get a cold. You can teach your child ways to stop spreading colds by telling her to:

- **Cover her mouth with her arm when she sneezes or coughs.**
- **Put used tissues directly into the trash.**
- **Frequently wash her hands.**
- **Keep her hands away from her face, including her eyes, nose and mouth.**

Remember:

- Colds are caused by viruses, so they can't be treated with antibiotics.
- If cold symptoms get worse after three days, call your doctor.
- To prevent colds from spreading, encourage your child to cover her mouth when she sneezes or coughs, and to wash her hands often.