

# Colds: What You Need to Know

Most children get 8 to 10 colds before they are 2 years old. Most colds come and go without any big problems.

There is **no** cure for the common cold because colds are caused by viruses. Antibiotics don't kill viruses, so they will not make your child's cold better. But you can help your child **feel** better until the cold goes away.

Here is more information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) about colds.

## Signs of a Cold

Colds usually last about a week but can even last for 10 days. Children can get one cold right after another. So it may seem like your child is sick for a long time.

Signs and symptoms of a cold include

- Stuffy, runny nose
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Watery eyes
- Eating more slowly or not feeling hungry
- Sore throat

Sign and symptoms of a cold can make your child fussy too. If there is fever, it should come at the start of the cold and then go away. Mucus in your child's nose may turn yellow or green after 3 or 4 days.

## Is it a cold or the flu?

Both the common cold and the flu are caused by viruses. In general, it may be hard for you to tell them apart because they can have some of the same symptoms. But there are some differences.

Cold Versus Flu		
Signs and Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Symptom onset	Gradual	Abrupt
Fever	Rare	Usual
Aches	Slight	Usual
Chills	Uncommon	Fairly common
Fatigue, weakness	Sometimes	Usual
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate	Common
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Headache	Rare	Common

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cold versus flu. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/coldflu.htm>. Accessed May 18, 2020.

## When to Call the Doctor

Call the doctor if your child has any of these signs.

- Fever lasting more than 2 or 3 days
- Cold symptoms that get worse, instead of better, after a week
- Trouble breathing or drinking
- Ear pain
- Acting very sleepy or fussy
- Coughing more than 10 days

## How to Care for Your Child

### To help a stuffy nose

- **Put a cool-mist humidifier in your child's room.** A humidifier puts water into the air to help clear your child's stuffy nose. Be sure to clean the humidifier often.
- **Thin the mucus.** Use saline (saltwater) nose drops. Never use any other kind of nose drops unless your child's doctor prescribes them.
- **Clear your baby's nose with a suction bulb** (also called an ear bulb.) Squeeze the bulb first and hold it in. Gently put the rubber tip into one nostril and slowly release the bulb. This will suck the clogged mucus out of the nose. It works best for babies younger than 6 months.

### To help fever and aches

Two types of medicines for pain and fever are acetaminophen and ibuprofen. *Never* give your child aspirin. It can be dangerous for children younger than 18 years.

- For a baby 6 months or younger, give acetaminophen.
- For a baby or child older than 6 months, give **either** acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Both of these drugs help with fever. But they are not the same. Be sure to get the right kind of medicine for your child's age and weight. Follow what the label says or ask your child's doctor how much to give.

Don't give any other medicines without asking your child's doctor.

### Make sure your child drinks lots of liquids.

Make sure your child drinks plenty of liquids to avoid getting dehydrated. Being dehydrated means your child's body loses water and gets very dry inside.

## Can you prevent colds?

There is no special way to prevent colds. But you can help keep viruses and other infections from spreading.

- Make sure everyone washes their hands often. Handwashing helps keep germs from spreading.

- Cough and sneeze into a tissue and then throw the tissue away. Wash your hands afterwards. If you don't have time to get a tissue, bend your arm and sneeze into it.
- Keep your child away from anyone who has a cold, fever, or runny nose.
- Don't share spoons, forks, or drinking cups with anyone who has a cold, fever, or runny nose.
- Wash dishes in hot, soapy water.
- Keep your child away from cigarette and other tobacco smoke. Don't smoke inside your home or in your car, and don't smoke anywhere near your children, even if you are outside.

## A Warning About Cold and Cough Medicines

The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold medicines for children younger than 4 years. Children 4 to 6 years of age should only use OTC cough and cold medicines if a doctor says it is OK. After age 6 years the directions on the package can be followed (but be very careful with dosing).

## Remember

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's health, contact your child's doctor.

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