

Cold: Home Care

What is a cold?

A cold is sometimes called a “U.R.I.” which is short for “upper respiratory infection.” When your child has a cold, you may see symptoms such as:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Runny or stuffy nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cough, hoarse voice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Red eyes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sore throat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swollen neck glands

What causes a cold?

Cold viruses cause colds. They spread through coughing, sneezing or through direct contact (“hand-to-hand”). Colds are not caused by air that is too cold or drafts. A child may have 6 to 8 colds per year.

How is a cold treated?

There is no medicine that can stop the cold virus or make it go away faster. Colds can last up to 14 days. Fevers related to a cold go away in about 3 days. A cough may last 7 or 8 days. Medicine to help coughing bring up mucus may be used during the day; medicine to help quiet coughing may be used at night. Ask your child’s doctor, nurse or pharmacist about medicine to use for cold symptoms.

How can I help my child feel better?

- Allow for plenty of rest. Have your child go to bed early at night or take a nap.
- Offer fluids often and add 1 to 2 extra glasses of water or juice a day.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) for fevers over 101o F and discomfort. Follow the directions on the bottle of medicine for your child’s age. Ask the doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have questions about the medicine.
- For sore throat or cough:
 - If your child is older than 4 years, offer your child hard candy or a throat lozenge. Never allow your child to lie down or go to sleep while having hard candy or a throat lozenge in the mouth.
 - If your child is over 1 year old, offer your child warm liquid like broth, soup or tea (use only tea without caffeine).

How can I help my child feel better?

- Use a cool-mist humidifier in your child's room to help your child breathe more easily. Clean the humidifier according to manufacturer's directions on a regular basis.
- If your child has a stuffy nose, talk to the doctor, nurse or pharmacist to see if you can use a decongestant for your child. Avoid decongestant medicines with anti-histamines that may make your child sleepy or irritable.
- Stuffy noses are caused by dried mucus. Use warm water or saline (salt-water) nose drops to loosen up the dried mucus. To make saline nose drops, add ½ teaspoon salt to 1-cup warm water. Place 2 to 3 drops into each nostril while your child is lying on their back. Then have your child blow their nose or you can use a bulb syringe to suction the mucus for younger children.
- Offer your child warm salt water to gargle if they are old enough. Use one teaspoonful of salt to 8 ounces (1 cup) of water.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water often. Have your child wash his or her hands often too. Remember that the cold virus is often spread from direct contact (through touching).
- A runny nose is the body's way to remove the virus from the nose and sinuses. Wiping and/or blowing the nose often are best. For sore or sensitive skin after wiping, apply a small amount of petroleum jelly or Vaseline® to the skin around the nose.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child:

- Has trouble breathing (breathes too fast or has a hard time taking breaths). Call right away.
- Has signs of being very sick such as sleeps all the time, is not able to drink fluids, complains of more and more pain when breathing. Call right away.
- Has an earache.
- Has sinus pressure or pain.
- Has a sore throat that lasts more than a day OR gets more painful.
- Has a temperature of 101°F or higher that lasts more than 2 days (48 hours).
- Has a cough that lasts more than 7 days.
- Has a runny nose that has lasted more than 14 days.
- Has yellow discharge from the eyes.
- Has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to provide you with additional information about your child's care. Diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up should be provided by your health care professional.