

Sore Throat (Viral)

Most sore throats are caused by viruses. A virus is a tiny germ that can cause illness. If your child has a sore throat, the doctor may swab the throat to take a sample of the mucus at the back of the throat. A throat culture test is then done to see if your child's sore throat is caused by bacteria (strep) or a virus.

The lab does a "rapid screen" test. The sample is checked again 24 hours later by the doctor. When the test is *negative*, it means that the sore throat **is** probably caused by a virus and not by bacteria. Antibiotics do not kill viruses. They can only help cure sore throats caused by bacteria. This is why antibiotic medicine such as penicillin is **not given if the test is negative**. When a sore throat is caused by a virus, the illness usually lasts 5 days or less.

Symptoms

If your child has a viral sore throat, he or she may have some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever
- Decreased appetite
- Hoarseness
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Mild sore throat, usually 2 or 3 days after the above symptoms start. The throat may look red with "yellow patches."
- Fussiness
- Sleeping more than usual



Picture 1 Do not give aspirin.
Instead, give acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever and pain.

How to Care for your Child

Keep your child home from school or child care if he has an underarm temperature over 100°F. He should be free of fever for 24 hours before returning to school.

- Have your child rest and play quietly indoors.
- Give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (such as Advil® or Motrin®) as directed for fever and pain. **Do not give aspirin or any product containing aspirin.**

How to Care for your Child, continued

- Give your child **lots of liquids** to drink such as water, fruit juice, and popsicles.
- Give soft foods often, but do not force your child to eat. He may not want to eat much if it hurts to swallow.
- If your child is able to gargle and spit, salt water gargles may make his throat feel better. (Mix 1/2 teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water.) **Do not let your child swallow the salt water; have him spit it out.**
- A throat spray may also ease discomfort. Do not use a throat spray that contains benzocaine, as this could cause a drug reaction. Check with your child's doctor.
- You can use a cool mist humidifier in your child's room at night.



Picture 2 Give your child lots of liquids to drink

How to Protect Others

- Make sure to wash your child's drinking glass and eating utensils in hot soapy water before others use them.
- Give your child a paper bag and have him put his used tissues in this bag. Moisture from the child's nose and mouth is contagious.
- Have your child wash his hands often.
- Wash your hands after touching your child.
- Throw away your child's toothbrush and buy a new one as soon as the illness is over. The germs that caused the sore throat may be on the child's toothbrush.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor if your child:

- Has trouble breathing.
- Still has a fever for 2 to 3 days after seeing the doctor.
- Stops drinking liquids.
- Starts pulling at his ears.
- Becomes a lot more fussy.

When to Call the Doctor, continued

- Has any of these signs of dehydration:
 - Stops crying tears
 - Urinates less often
 - Has dry, cracked lips

If you need a doctor for your child, call the Nationwide Children's Hospital referral and Information Line at (614) 722-KIDS.

Other Helping Hands

These Helping Hands can also help you care for your child:

- *Temperature: Oral, Rectal, and Axillary*, HH-II-27
- *Fever*, HH-I-105

Please ask for them if they have not been given to you.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse.