

Upper Respiratory Infections (Colds)

The common cold is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. It is spread by breathing in air droplets of the infected person who coughs, sneezes, or even laughs less than 3 feet from your child. The virus can also be spread by touching something that the infected person has sneezed, coughed, or drooled on.

A cold affects the nose and throat. Symptoms usually start slowly and include:

- runny or stuffy nose
- sneezing
- cough
- sore throat

It may take 3 to 14 days for your child to get well. Usually, your child can do all of his or her normal activities.

Treatment

Since the common cold is a virus, antibiotics will not help.

- Have your child drink plenty of fluids, such as water, chicken broth, or popsicles (Picture 1). Limit fruit juice so that your child does not develop diarrhea.
- Give small amounts of liquids often, but do not force him or her to drink or eat. Your child will eat when hungry. It is more important for your child to drink than to eat.
- Your child should get plenty of rest.
- For a stuffy nose:
 - Use a saline nasal spray and a bulb syringe to help congestion before eating or sleeping.
 - You can put moisture into the air with a cool mist vaporizer or humidifier. Do not put medicine in the vaporizer. Change the water in it every day and clean it between uses.



Picture 1 Give lots of liquids in small amounts and often.

- If you do not have a vaporizer or humidifier, you can run hot water in the shower for 10 to 15 minutes (Picture 2). Keep the door closed and stay with your child while he breathes in the moist air. Be careful to keep him away from the hot water.
- To prevent or treat skin irritation around the nose and on the lips, apply petroleum jelly (Vaseline[®]) or an unscented cream such as Eucerin[®], Cetaphil[®], or Aquaphor[®].
- For a sore throat:
 - Sip warm apple juice, herbal tea, or warm lemon water mixed with 1 to 2 teaspoons of honey. Honey works well for coughs, too. However, it is not safe to give honey to children younger than age 1.
 - Sometimes sipping ice cold drinks works well.
 - Older children also can suck on cough drops or hard candy or gargle with warm salt water ($\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of table salt dissolved in 8 ounces of warm water).
- For a sore throat, aches and pains or to help to bring down a fever, you may give:
 - ibuprofen (Children's or Infant's Motrin[®], Advil[®]) to children over 6 months
 - acetaminophen (Children's or Infant's Tylenol[®]) to children over 2 months.
- **Do not give aspirin or products that contain aspirin to children (Picture 3).**
- **Over-the-counter (OTC) cold and cough medicines are not effective and are not recommended. They should not be given to children younger than 4 years of age.**
- **For ages 4 to 6, ask your child's doctor which OTC's are safe. Do not give OTC's unless first OK'd.**
- **You should never give your child medicine for adults.**



Picture 2 Moist air from a steam shower can make breathing easier.



Picture 3 Do not give aspirin. Read the label of any medicine before giving, to know the right dose for the age of your child.

Protecting your child and others

- Good hand washing is VERY important! Clean your hands and your child's hands often with soap and water. Wash for 15 to 20 seconds or the same amount of time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song.
- If you do not have access to soap and water, use alcohol-based hand wipes or gel hand cleaner. Rub hands until dry.
- Teach your child to avoid touching his eyes, nose, and mouth whenever possible.

- Teach your child to cover his nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or to cough into his shirt sleeve. Wash hands afterwards (Picture 4).
- Keep a trash can nearby or a paper bag taped to the bed or couch for throwing out used tissues.
- Wash the sick child's drinking glasses, knives, forks, or spoons with hot soapy water. Do not let other family members use them.
- Other children should not play with or sleep in the same bed with your sick child during the early stage of the cold.



Picture 4 Frequent hand washing can help prevent spreading the virus to others.

Fever

Children with a cold often do not have a fever. If your child has a fever under 100.4° F, he does not need to be treated unless he has other symptoms. Fever is the body's way of fighting infection. A fever is a temperature of at least:

- 100° F by mouth (this way is not recommended in children under 4 years of age)
- 99° F under the arm
- 100.4° F by rectum (bottom), on the forehead, or by ear

When to call the doctor

Call the doctor when your child's:

- Cough is "brassy," high-pitched, or has a barking sound.
- Breathing is difficult, child is gasping, wheezing, or grunting.
- Fever does not come down or go away after treatment and:
 - Under age 2, after 1 day, fever is over 102 degrees F by rectum or over 103 degrees F under the arm, on the forehead, or by ear
 - Age 2 or older, after 3 days, fever is over 102 degrees F by mouth or by rectum or over 103 degrees F under the arm, on the forehead, or by ear
- Skin color changes to grayish blue or very pale.
- Sickness lasts more than 10 days or worsens after improving.
- Child complains of ear pain, pulls at his ears or rolls his head from side to side.
- Child has difficulty swallowing or refuses to take liquids for 4 hours or more.
- Child does not feel like playing or does not "act right."