

Kid Care: Colds



Colds are a common childhood illness. The following suggestions should help your child get better soon. If your child hasn't had a fever for the past 24 hours and feels OK, they can return to regular activities at school and at play. You can help prevent future colds by following the tips at the end of this sheet.

There is no cure for the common cold. An older child usually doesn't need to see a healthcare provider unless the cold becomes serious. If your child is 3 months or younger, call your child's healthcare provider at the first sign of illness. A young baby's cold can become more serious very quickly. It can develop into a serious problem such as pneumonia.

Ease congestion

- Use a cool-mist vaporizer (humidifier) to help loosen mucus. Don't use a hot-steam vaporizer with a young child who could get burned. Make sure to clean the vaporizer often to help prevent mold growth.
- Try over-the-counter saline nasal sprays. They're safe for children. These aren't the same as nasal decongestant sprays, which may make symptoms worse. Talk with the pharmacist or healthcare provider if you have questions about what to use.
- Use a bulb syringe to clear the nose of a child too young to blow their nose. Wash the bulb syringe often in hot, soapy water. Be sure to rinse out all of the soap and drain all of the water before using it again.

Soothe a sore throat

- Offer plenty of liquids to keep the throat moist and reduce pain. Good choices include ice chips, water, or frozen fruit bars.
- Give children age 4 or older throat drops or lozenges to keep the throat moist and soothe pain.
- Give ibuprofen or acetaminophen as advised by your child's healthcare provider to relieve pain. Never give aspirin to a child under age 18 who has a cold or flu. It could cause a rare but serious condition called Reye syndrome.

Before you give your child medicine

Cold and cough medicines should not be used for children under the age of 6, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. These medicines don't work on young children and may cause harmful side effects. If your child is age 6 or older, use care when giving cold and cough medicines. Always follow instructions from your child's healthcare provider.

Quiet a cough

- Serve warm fluids such as clear soups to help loosen mucus.
- Use a cool-mist vaporizer to ease croup. Croup causes dry, barking coughs.
- Use cough medicine for children age 6 or older only if advised by your child's healthcare provider.
- Never give honey to a child younger than 1 year.

Preventing colds



To help children stay healthy:

- Teach children to wash their hands often. This includes before eating and after using the bathroom, playing with animals, or coughing or sneezing. Carry an alcohol-based hand gel containing at least 60% alcohol. This is for times when soap and water aren't available.
- Remind children not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Throw tissues away right after they are used. Then wash your hands.
- Don't let children share drinking cups, utensils, or pacifiers.
- Stay away from other people who are sick.

Tips for correct handwashing

Use clean, running water and plenty of soap. Work up a good lather.

- Clean the whole hand, under the nails, between the fingers, and up the wrists.
- Wash for at least 20 seconds. This is about as long as it takes to say the alphabet or sing "Happy Birthday" twice. Don't just wash. Scrub well.
- Rinse well. Let the water run down the fingers, not up the wrists.
- In a public restroom, use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the door.

When to call the healthcare provider

Call your child's healthcare provider right away if your child has any of these symptoms:

- Fever (see Children and fever below)
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- Your child looks very ill or is unusually fussy or drowsy

- Severe ear pain or sore throat
- Unexplained rash
- Repeated vomiting and diarrhea
- A stiff neck or severe headache
- Persistent brown, green, or bloody mucus
- Signs of dehydration, which include severe thirst, dark yellow urine, infrequent urination, dull eyes, dry skin, and dry or cracked lips.
- Your child's symptoms seem to be getting worse
- Your child doesn't look or act right to you

Call 911

Call 911 if your child has:

- Rapid breathing or shortness of breath
- Trouble swallowing
- A seizure
- Signs of severe dehydration, which include sunken eyes, no tears or urine, and extreme tiredness
- Blue, purple, or gray color skin, lips, or fingernails

Fever and children

Use a digital thermometer to check your child's temperature. Don't use a mercury thermometer. There are different kinds and uses of digital thermometers. They include:

- **Rectal.** For children younger than 3 years, a rectal temperature is the most accurate.
- **Forehead (temporal).** This works for children age 3 months and older. If a child under 3 months old has signs of illness, this can be used for a first pass. The provider may want to confirm with a rectal temperature.
- **Ear (tympanic).** Ear temperatures are accurate after 6 months of age, but not before.
- **Armpit (axillary).** This is the least reliable but may be used for a first pass to check a child of any age with signs of illness. The provider may want to confirm with a rectal temperature.
- **Mouth (oral).** Don't use a thermometer in your child's mouth until they are at least 4 years old.

Use the rectal thermometer with care. Follow the product maker's directions for correct use. Insert it gently. Label it and make sure it's not used in the mouth. It may pass on germs from the stool. If you don't feel OK using a rectal thermometer, ask the healthcare provider what type to use instead. When you talk with any healthcare provider about your child's fever, tell them which type you used.

Below are guidelines to know if your young child has a fever. Your child's healthcare provider may give you different numbers for your child. Follow your provider's specific instructions.

Fever readings for a baby under 3 months old:

- First, ask your child's healthcare provider how you should take the temperature.
- Rectal or forehead: 100.4°F (38°C) or higher

- Armpit: 99°F (37.2°C) or higher

Fever readings for a child age 3 months to 36 months (3 years):

- Rectal, forehead, or ear: 102°F (38.9°C) or higher
- Armpit: 101°F (38.3°C) or higher

Call the healthcare provider in these cases:

- Repeated temperature of 104°F (40°C) or higher in a child of any age
- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher in baby younger than 3 months
- Fever that lasts more than 24 hours in a child under age 2
- Fever that lasts for 3 days in a child age 2 or older

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