

HARBORVIEW MEDICAL CENTER

CHILDREN AND TEENS CLINIC

Clinic: (206) 744-3335

How to Treat your Child's Cough or Cold at Home



Illustrated by Kathryn Osterman

WHAT IS A COLD?

The common cold is transmitted from person to person, usually by touching a person who has a cold, or touching something that that person has touched (like a door) -- and then touching your mouth or eye.

Colds can occur at any time of year, but are more common during the winter months. The average child has 6 colds a year, although children in daycare or preschool can have them more frequently.

Typically symptoms of a cold are runny nose, sneezing, mild sore throat, cough and a slight fever. Most colds last between one and two weeks, and progress from watery runny nose and possibly a mild sore throat to thicker mucus and congestion with cough.

The most important thing about colds is PREVENTION. Wash your hands after being outside of your home, and tell your children to do the same. Making sure that children get enough sleep and eat well also helps to prevent colds. For young babies (less than 2 months) try to avoid contact with people who have colds, and try to avoid crowds and gatherings where someone almost certainly has a cold.

There is no "cure" for a cold. Our bodies fight off the cold without any need for medicines, and we cannot make them go away any faster with medicines. Antibiotics (like Amoxicillin) do not help colds. The only thing we can do for children is to make them as comfortable as possible and wait for the symptoms to go away.

HOME TREATMENT

Although many people use medicines to make their children feel better when they have a cold, there are several things that you can do for your child AT HOME that may be better than giving medicine:

- 1) Have your child drink lots of fluids. Many children lost their appetite with a cold, and may drink less as well. By encouraging them to drink more, you will help make the mucus thinner, and make them more comfortable.
- 2) Use saline drops and a bulb syringe, or a saline nose spray to remove the mucus. See the instruction sheet available in the pharmacy for how to prepare the saline and use the bulb syringe.
- 3) Humidifier. If you have one, then a humidifier may help to keep the nose, mouth and throat moist, making your child more comfortable.
- 4) Use some vaseline (petroleum jelly) around your child's nose to help prevent it becoming sore.
- 5) Try and have your child get extra rest. It is not necessary to restrict their activities or keep them home from school or daycare, but slowing them down a little may help them to feel better.
- 6) Remember that fever is not all bad. Fever may help to fight the cold.

WHAT MEDICINES CAN I GIVE MY CHILD?

There are many medicines that you can buy at the store for coughs and colds. It is not clear how much these medicines help children. Doctors do not recommend any medications for cold treatment for infants and small children because they have not been shown to help and may have harmful side effects. Treatment for fever with acetaminophen may help if your child has a fever with their cough and cold. It is good to remember that your child's cold will get better in one to two weeks without medicines.

MEDICINE FOR FEVER

- **TYLENOL®** (same as **ACETAMINOPHEN**)

This medicine helps with fever, although it does not cure the underlying illness.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR:

- Your child has any difficulty breathing or is breathing fast.
- Your child develops a fever that lasts for more than 3 days.
- Your child has nasal discharge lasting greater than 14 days
- Your child develops an earache.
- Your child has chills or rigors.
- Your child has eye discharge.
- Your child's cough becomes worse, or barky.
- Your child's cough persists for more than 2 weeks.
- Your child develops a headache or stiff neck.
- Your child develops a sore throat that lasts for more than 48 hours.
- Your child is less than 2 months old and has any temperature elevation.
- Your child is less than 2 years old and is not drinking fluids.
- Your child seems more sick than with a regular cold, or you are worried.