

The Common Cold

Colds are upper respiratory infections caused by viruses. Preschool children get three to nine colds a year. That's one at least every six weeks! Children in out-of-home day care programs get more, especially if their playgroup has 7 or more kids.

Symptoms may include nasal discharge and congestion, fever, chills, generalized aches, and scratchy throat. The infection usually last 3-7 days but symptoms may persist for up to two weeks. Most are self-limited.

They are easily passed by contact with secretions that then one touches to one's eye or nose. Occasionally a direct cough into another's face will cause it as well (daycare providers, flush your eyes immediately if you get a "direct hit.")

Treatment

Antibiotics and vitamin C have been shown to be ineffective in treating or preventing viral respiratory tract infections. Medications can be used to alleviate symptoms during the self-limited course of the infection. Decongestants, expectorants, and cough suppressants are the main medications used. Antihistamines are used for allergy congestion and generally are not part of treating viral infections. Wash your hands a lot and don't share hand towels!

Special Care with Infants

The Academy of Pediatrics does not routinely recommend cough suppressants or decongestant use in children under 9 months of age because of potentially serious side effects of overdose even at proper dosing.

Cool mist, nasal saline drops with bulb suctioning, head elevation during sleep and extra oral fluids are recommended in this age. Saline drops can be purchased or made at home (1/4 tsp. salt in 8 oz. of water).

Decongestants

Decongestants just decrease the amount of secretions, not really improving matters. The flushing of secretions is nature's way of getting rid of the virus (and passing it along to others!) Just as effective are frequent steamy baths or showers. Even a little infant



will find relief by your taking a hot steamy shower with you in the middle of the night.

Cough suppressants

Always remember, your cough is a protective reflex that clears your airway! Cough suppressants act on the cough center in the brain. They are harder to get over the counter and generally are discouraged nowadays. because overdoses can stop your breathing. An old-fashioned hot toddy (1 ½ oz apple cider, 1 T honey, ½ lemon's juice, cinnamon all heated up with or without a tad of whiskey) does the trick with less potential ill effects and chemicals.

Expectorants

The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend their use in children because studies show only in experimentally high doses (not found in over-the-counter preparations) is there a significant benefit. Guaifenesin is the most common over-the-counter expectorant and is a synthetic version of the active compound in a guaiac tree (used by native Americans). Mucinex is a pure version and Robitussin compounds have it in a mixture too.

Viruses can be a "gateway " to further illness. Most colds need no medication treatment, but a failure to clear the infection may make a suitable environment for bacteria to set up camp. Sinuses can block up, ears can block up, and lungs can build up fluid turning to bronchitis or rarely pneumonia. So be vigilant for symptoms showing failure to clear this "cold." Prolonged symptoms (?allergy) or fever over 48 hrs or plain just not looking right are reasons to reevaluate. If in doubt, come in or call us!

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