Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) in Children

An Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) is another name for the common cold. A cold is caused by a virus that can settle in your child’s nose, throat or lungs. You may see a runny or stuffy nose and sneezing. Your child may also have a sore throat, cough, headache, fever and muscle aches.

See a doctor for care if your child has any signs that:

- Give you concern
- Get worse
- Last more than 10 days

For infants younger than 3 months, contact a doctor at the first sign of illness.

Treatment

There is no cure for the common cold. Antibiotics may be used to treat signs of a secondary infection, but they do not treat the cold virus. Below are some tips to keep your child comfortable.

- Get plenty of rest. Take naps during the day.
- Stay inside. Cold air can irritate the lining of the lungs, increasing coughing.
- Drink plenty of liquids, such as water, fruit juices high in Vitamin C, gelatin and popsicles. These help to keep mucus thin and ease congestion.

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For children age 3 and older, cough drops may be used to control a cough.
Use petroleum jelly or lip balm around lips and nose to prevent chapping.
Keep your child away from second-hand smoke.

**Over the Counter (OTC) Medicines:**
Talk to your child’s doctor or pharmacist before giving any medicine or home remedy. **Many ingredients are NOT safe for children under the age of 6.** There have been reports of accidental overdose and death. If your child’s doctor recommends giving OTC medicine or if you give your older child OTC medicine:

- **Read labels carefully.**
- Use a product that treats only the signs your child has.
- Talk to the pharmacist about side effects and possible interactions with other medicines your child is taking.
- Cold and cough medicines often contain more than one ingredient. Ask the pharmacist for help to confirm that you are not using more than one product with the same or similar ingredient. For example, some cold and cough medicines have acetaminophen or ibuprofen in them to help lower a fever or ease muscle aches. Do not give your child extra acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) if the cold or cough medicine has it as an ingredient.
- Shake liquid medicine well before using.
- Measure out the correct dose listed on the package for your child’s age. Use the medicine cup, spoon, dropper or syringe that comes with the medicine. If no device comes with the medicine, ask the pharmacist for help. Be sure to wash the device with soap and water and rinse well after each use.

  ▶ **Abbreviations for dosage:**
  
  Tbsp  = tablespoon  ml  =  milliliters
  Tsp   = teaspoon    cc  =  cubic centimeters

  ▶ **Helpful unit conversions:**
  
  1 ml  = 1 cc  
  15 ml  = 1 Tbsp
  5 ml  = 1 tsp  
  3 tsp  = 1 Tbsp

- **Do NOT** use a regular household spoon to measure medicine as it is not accurate and can lead to too much or too little medicine.
- Do not give your child more medicine until it’s time for the next dose.
**General Medicine Safety:**

- It is NOT okay to assume that children are “small adults” and give them a smaller portion of an adult dose as this can lead to an overdose.
- **Do not give aspirin** or combination products containing aspirin to children under age 19 who have a virus, such as a cold. It may cause Reye’s Syndrome, a serious and sometimes fatal illness.
- **Do not** give antibiotics or medicine prescribed for other people.
- **Do not** give medicines that are past their expiration date.
- Store medicines safely to keep them away from the reach or discovery of children.

**Saline Nose Drops or Spray:**

Saline nose drops or spray can be used for children too young to take most cold and cough medicines to help with congestion.

- Buy saline nose drops or spray at your local pharmacy. Ask a pharmacist for help to find the best product for your child. Be sure to ask questions about how much to use and how often to give the product.
- Use a bulb syringe to gently suction the nose after using the saline. Squeeze the bulb syringe half way before placing the tip inside the nostril. Release the bulb slowly. Read the handout, [How to Suction Your Baby’s Nose with a Bulb Syringe](#), for more information. Wash the bulb syringe with soap and water between uses.

**Use an Air Humidifier:**

A cool mist humidifier can make breathing easier by thinning mucus. Do not use a steam humidifier as hot water can cause burns if spilled.

- Place the humidifier a few feet from the bed. **Drain and clean each day with soap and water to prevent bacteria and mold from growing.**
- Indoor humidity should not be above 50%. Stop using the humidifier if you notice moisture on windows, walls or pictures.
- You do not need to add any medicine to the humidifier.
- If you cannot get a humidifier, place a pan of water next to heating vents and refill the water level daily. The water will evaporate and add moisture to the room.

**Food and Drinks when Sick:**

- Give food and drink when the child asks for it, not only at mealtimes.
- Do not force your child to eat normal meals or solid food when he or she feels sick. If your child has nausea or vomiting, contact your child’s doctor.
Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if your child has:

- Problems breathing
- Pale or blue lips and skin
- Rattles in the chest or wheezing
- Unusual sleepiness or is not responsive

Call your child’s doctor if your child has:

- A fever of more than 100.4 degrees F or 38 degrees C and is less than 3 months old
- A fever of more than 100.4 degrees F or 38 degrees C lasting 3 days or more in older children
- A fever of more than 103 degrees F or 39.4 degrees C
- Vomiting or abdominal pain
- Signs of dehydration such as urinating less often
- Signs of tiredness and weakness after 3 days
- Persistent crying
- Headache or throat pain that gets worse
- New signs, such as ear pain
- Signs lasting 10 or more days
- Signs not relieved by medicines
- Any signs that give you concern

How to prevent the spread of colds

- Wash your and your child’s hands with soap and water or use alcohol based hand sanitizer often. Dry hands wet from washing with soap on a paper towel instead of cloth towel.
  - Keep hand sanitizers out of children’s reach and have your child use only with supervision. Call poison control at 1-800-222-1222 if your child swallows any gel.
- Teach your child to cough or sneeze into his or her elbow to avoid spreading germs.
- Wipe down toys and common surfaces, such as door knobs and faucet handles, with a disinfectant spray. Washable toys can be laundered to remove germs.
- Do not share cups or utensils while your child is sick.