



## Colds: What You Need to Know

### Causes

Colds (also known as upper respiratory infections or URI's) are caused by viruses – adenovirus, para-influenza virus, rhinovirus – it seems like there are a zillion different strains! That's why it's next to impossible to build a resistance or immunity to colds. Why do some children get more colds than other? Overdoing it and improper diet often play a role. For others, genetic factors or allergies factor in. Children in daycare, in school, or even in large families are at increased risk. Especially during the winter months, this “herd effect” – or what could also be called “the dominos effect” – dramatically increase the chances of getting sick.

### Complications & Prevention

Perhaps the most common problem that children, especially those between six and twenty-four months old, get from a cold is an ear infection. These usually occur a few days into the cold. When a cold lasts more than ten days, doctors now regard this as a sinus infection or sinusitis. The color of the nasal mucus is not regarded as important in diagnosing sinusitis. Colds will often bring on an asthma flare-up; on rare occasion, they can lead into pneumonia. Good hand washing, avoiding tobacco smoke exposure, and reducing allergy triggers such as dust and mold can lessen the likelihood of complications.

### Treatment Options

- Saline nose drops, sprays, or gels (e.g. Ayr, Little Noses) can help thin the mucus and are gentler than a bulb syringe. They are safe at any age. We generally prefer that you not use medicated nasal sprays (e.g. Afrin, Neo-Synephrine).
- A humidifier or cool-mist vaporizer can help, especially during the winter months when the heat is on. Colds with a croupy cough also do well with the added moisture.
- For older children, vapor rubs, vapor patches, and lozenges can help a bit.
- For children with underlying allergies, continuing or restarting your recommended medication(s) is a good idea.
- An oral decongestant such as Sudafed, Dimetapp, or Triaminic may help your child get through the day. Unhappily, they don't shorten the duration of the cold.
- A number of families try natural supplements, including Echinacea, goldenseal, vitamin C, and zinc. Unfortunately, there is not much data on safety and efficacy, especially in small children.
- Fever, headache, or sore throat can be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Check with us if these symptoms are severe.
- Rest – an extra hour or two of sleep and fluids – soup or juice for the older child – should also be a very important part of the treatment plan