

Cold Myths

the truths about having a cold

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The common cold is an upper respiratory tract infection that is caused by a virus and inflames the lining of the nose and throat. Colds are extremely common and most children will have 8-10 colds in the first 2 years of life. If your child is in day care or has an older sibling, they may have even more colds since viruses spread easily among children. During the winter, the viruses that cause colds are circulating in larger numbers, so your child may be more susceptible to catching a cold this time of year.



Despite many common myths, you cannot catch a cold from being in a drafty area or from not wearing a hat or jacket in cold weather. Colds are caused by viruses, and viruses are passed from one person to another through direct contact. If a person with a cold coughs, sneezes, or touches their nose the contagious virus particles are transferred to their hand. If these moisture particles then touch the hand or mouth area of a healthy child, the virus can contaminate the healthy child's nose or throat. The virus will then grow and multiply, soon giving rise to new cold symptoms. The cycle then begins again.

Signs that you may see if your child has a cold is that their nose may be runny or stuffy, they may sneeze, cough, have a fever, or may be tired or achy. Most colds last between 5-10 days and fortunately, most will go away on their own. If your baby is less than 3 months old, the best prevention against colds is to keep him away from people who have cold symptoms. A virus that causes a mild cold in an adult may cause a more serious illness in an infant.

There is no cure for the common cold.

Unlike bacteria, viruses do not respond to penicillin or other antibiotics and these should not be used to treat colds. The key to treating your child's cold is to treat the symptoms and to keep your child as comfortable as possible while their bodies fight off the virus. Here are some tips:

- When your child has a stuffy nose, he will tend to breathe through their mouth. This can dry out the mouth. Be sure to give your child lots of fluids, such as juice or water to make sure he stays hydrated.
- Your child's appetite will probably decrease when he does not feel well. Make sure sick children eat nutritious meals, even if they are small meals.
- Using a clean, cool mist humidifier or vaporizer may help ease stuffy noses.
- For fever, you can give acetaminophen or ibuprofen (Always be sure to give the recommended dose for your child's weight). Ibuprofen should not be used for children less than 6 months old or for children who are dehydrated or vomiting.
- For infants, you can clear stuffy noses with a bulb suction. Your physician may also recommend saline nose drops to help with particularly thick secretions.

continued next page

- Over the counter cold or cough medicines should not be used in infants unless prescribed by your baby's physician. Coughing is a protective mechanism and ordinarily there is no reason to suppress it.
- As always, be sure to give lots of tender loving care.

Ordinarily, you won't need to take your child to see the doctor when they have a cold. If your infant is 3 months old or younger, call your doctor at the first signs of illness, because in babies colds can quickly develop into more serious ailments.

Call your child's physician if any of the following occur:

- Your child develops a persistent cough, sore throat, ear pain
- Fever lasts longer than 48 hours
- Trouble breathing
- Your infant loses his appetite and refuses several feedings
- Your infant doesn't have a wet diaper in more than 8 hours
- Seems excessively irritable, or is unusually sleepy or hard to awaken.
- If your baby is less than 3 months old, always contact your physician if they have a rectal temperature higher than 100.5 Fahrenheit.

Some information in this article excerpted from the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org)



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