



What is a Cold?

A cold is an upper respiratory infection (URI) which can lead to a runny nose and congestion. In a young infant, the small size of the air passages through the nose and between the ear and throat can cause problems not seen as often in larger children and adults. Infants and young children average 6 to 10 upper respiratory infections each year.

How does it occur?

A URI can be caused by many different viruses. Your child may have caught the virus from another person or got it from touching something with the virus on it.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- * runny nose or mucus blocking the air passages in the nose
- * congestion
- * cough and hoarseness
- * mild fever, usually less than 100°F
- * poor feeding
- * rash

How is it treated?

Unfortunately, there's no cure for the common cold. Antibiotics may be used to combat bacterial infections, but they have no effect on viruses, so the best you can do is to make your child comfortable. Make sure she gets extra rest and drinks increased amounts of fluids.

It's important to note, though, that over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold medicines should not be given to infants and children under two years old because of the risk of life-threatening side effects. Also, several studies show that cold and cough products don't work in children younger than four years and can have potentially serious side effects. In addition, keep in mind that coughing clears mucus from the lower part of the respiratory tract, and ordinarily there's no reason to suppress it. If your doctor believes your child will benefit from a cough or cold medication, he/she will discuss this with you.

If your infant is having trouble breathing or drinking because of nasal congestion, clear her nose with normal saline (salt water) nose drops or spray, which are available without a prescription. If the drainage is thick, this can then be followed by suction with a rubber suction bulb up to 4 times daily. Place 2-3 drops in each nostril fifteen to twenty minutes before feeding, and then immediately suction with the bulb. Never use nose drops that contain any medication unless directed by your doctor, since excessive amounts can be absorbed.

When using the suction bulb, remember to squeeze the bulb part of the syringe first, gently stick the rubber tip into one nostril, block the other nostril with your finger, and then slowly release the bulb. This slight amount of suction will draw the clogged mucus out of the nose and should allow her to breathe and suck at the same time once again. You'll find that this technique works best when your baby is under six months of age. As she gets older, she'll fight the bulb, making it difficult to suction the mucus, but the saline drops will still be effective.

A cool mist humidifier in your child's room may help loosen nasal secretions and minimize cough. (The humidifier must be cleaned per the manufacturer recommendations to prevent mold growth)

For babies over 3 months old, over the counter Infant Vicks VapoRub applied before bed may help with cold symptoms.

How long will it last?

Symptoms usually begin 1 to 3 days after exposure to the virus, and can last 1 to 2 weeks.

How can I help prevent URI?

* Viruses causing an URI are spread from person to person, so try to avoid exposing your baby to people who have cold symptoms. Avoiding crowded places (such as shopping malls or supermarkets) can help decrease exposures, especially during the fall and winter months when many people have colds.

* Keeping hands clean can also help slow the spread of viruses. Ask people who touch your baby to wash their hands first.

* Flu is common in the winter. Family members should get flu shots, to reduce the risk of your baby being exposed.

When should I call my child's doctor?

Call immediately if:

* Your child has had no wet diapers for more than 8 hours.

* Your child has very rapid breathing (more than 60 breaths in a minute) or trouble breathing.

* Your child is extremely tired or hard to wake up.

* You cannot console your child.

Call during office hours if:

* Your child has a fever lasting more than 5 days.