



Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) in Babies

What is a URI?

A URI, or upper respiratory infection, is an infection 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 8 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 diagnosed?

Your child's doctor will review the symptoms and may look in your child's ears to make sure there is not an ear infection.

How is it treated?

Because your baby has such small nasal air passages, congestion and mucus can cause trouble breathing. Most babies do not eat well when they are having trouble breathing. Use a small bulb and saline drops to help clear the air passages. Put 1 drop of warm water or saline into each nostril (one nostril at a time). Gently remove the mucus with the bulb about a minute later.

Antibiotics can kill bacteria, but not viruses. If your child has a viral illness such as a URI, an antibiotic will not help. If your child has an ear infection caused by bacteria, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic to treat it.

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.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

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.