



Dr. Lara Varisco Leonhardt, MD

Bee well pediatrics



A cold or upper respiratory infection is an infection of the nose and throat caused by a virus.

Symptoms of a cold may include:

- runny or stuffy nose
- fever
- sore throat
- sometimes a cough or hoarse voice
- red or watery eyes
- swollen lymph nodes in the neck.

What is the cause?

The cold viruses are spread from one person to another by hand contact, coughing, and sneezing. Colds are not caused by cold air or drafts. Because there are up to 200 viruses that cause colds, most healthy children get at least 6 colds a year.

How long does it last?

Usually the fever lasts 2 or 3 days. The sore throat may last 5 days. Nasal discharge and congestion may last up to 2 weeks. A cough may last 3 weeks.

Yellow or green nasal discharge are a normal part of the body's reaction to a cold. As an isolated symptom, they do not mean your child has a sinus infection.

How can I take care of my child?

Not much can be done to affect how long a cold lasts. However, we can relieve many of the symptoms.

- **Treatment for a runny nose with a lot of discharge.**

The best treatment is clearing the nose for a day or two. For younger babies, use a soft rubber suction bulb to remove the secretions gently.

Nasal discharge is the nose's way of getting rid of viruses. Antihistamines are not helpful unless your child has a nasal allergy.

- **Treatment for a dry or stuffy nose with only a little discharge or dried yellow-green mucus.**

Most stuffy noses are blocked by dry mucus. Blowing the nose or suction alone cannot remove most dry secretions. Using nosedrops and then suctioning or blowing out the fluid in the nose can help. Decongestant nosedrops, such as Afrin or Neosynephrine, twice daily may be helpful for up to three days.

To make normal saline nosedrops, mix 1/2 teaspoon of table salt in 8 ounces of water. Make up a fresh solution every few days and keep it in a clean bottle.

- **The importance of clearing the nose of a young infant.**

A child can't breathe through the mouth and suck on something at the same time. If your child is breast-feeding or bottle-feeding, you must clear his nose out so he can breathe while he's sucking. It is also important to clear your infant's nose before you put him down to sleep.

- **Treatment for other symptoms of colds.**

- Fever: Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen for aches or mild fever (over 102°F)
- Sore throat: Use hard candies for children over 4 years old and warm chicken broth for children over 1 year old.
- Cough: Use cough drops for children over 4 years old. Use a warm humidifier to make the air in the room less dry.
- Red eyes: Rinse frequently with wet cotton balls.
- Poor appetite: Encourage drinking fluids by letting the child choose what to drink.

- **Prevention of colds.**

A cold is caused by direct contact with someone who already has a cold. Over the years we are all exposed to many colds and develop some immunity to them. Teach children to wash hands often, especially after coming in contact with someone who has a cold. Vitamin C, unfortunately, has not been shown to prevent or shorten colds. Large doses of vitamin C (for example, 2 grams) cause diarrhea.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if: Breathing becomes difficult AND no better after you clear the nose. Fever higher than 101 for more than 3 days or other concerns.