

Colds and Coughs in Children

Most coughs and colds are caused by a virus that infects the nose and throat. Sneezing, runny nose, sore throat, muscle aches and congestion can be irritating to your child. Coughing can keep you and your child awake at night. Despite the discomfort, colds are not serious illnesses even if the cough sounds “deep” or breathing is noisy. Antibiotics are **not** effective against cold viruses and are used only for some problems related to colds, such as ear infections, sinus infections, or pneumonia. Symptoms of a cold may continue for 7 to 10 days, with a cough lasting several weeks. Your child may have a fever, too.

Home Treatment:

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Rest.
- Take acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®, Tempra®, or Panadol®) for fever and aches. **Do not use aspirin.**
- Use saline (salt water) nose drops and bulb syringe or nasal aspirator for infants. You can buy drops (no prescription is needed). Or mix no more than ¼ teaspoon of table salt in 8 oz. of warm water. Put 3 to 4 drops in each nostril.
- Use non-prescription cold and cough remedies for older children.

Contact the doctor if:

- Your child has fast or difficult breathing.
- Your child has fever of over 100.4°F (38°C) rectal (for infants less than 3 months of age, with fever lasting more than 4 to 5 days).

- Your child has a severe cough accompanied by high fever.
- Your child complains of ear or chest pain.
- Your child has thick yellow or green nasal discharge lasting more than 3 to 5 days.

Products listed are available in your pharmacy. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names. Any similar products may be used.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If your child has persistent health problems or if you have further questions, please consult your health care provider.

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