



Viral Illness

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.

What is a virus?

A virus is a germ too small to be seen by the human eye. It can spread easily from person to person and can cause illness. Viral illnesses are common in children. Colds, vomiting and diarrhea are often caused by viruses.

What is the difference between a viral infection and a bacterial infection?

Bacteria are germs that can usually be treated by antibiotics. Viruses are germs that do not respond to antibiotics. The body's natural defenses will usually fight against the virus and clear the illness up within a few days.

What are the possible symptoms?

Your child may have one or more of these:

- Fever (temperature over 100.3°F)
- Runny nose, cough or sore throat
- Stomachache, vomiting and diarrhea
- Skin rash
- Does not want to eat
- Be cranky or fussy

How is a viral illness treated?

Most of the treatment involves keeping your child comfortable and limiting the spread of the virus. Some general guidelines include:

- Have your child rest.
- Have your child avoid close contact with others.
- Make sure that you and your child wash your hands often and well for 20 seconds to help stop the spread of illness.
- Do not share toothbrushes, eating utensils or kiss on the lips.
- Give your child lots of fluids. He may also eat if he feels well enough.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or less costly store brand) may be given for fever or pain. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your doctor how much medicine to give.

DO NOT:

- Give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
- Give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
- Give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
- Give acetaminophen and ibuprofen together.
- Alternate these medicines.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Viral Illness, continued

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if your child has any of these:

- Does not smile or show interest in play for at least a few minutes during a four-hour period.
- Has a hard time breathing.
- Has a rash that a doctor has not already seen.
- Does not seem to be getting better after a few days.
- Shows signs of dehydration (drying out):
 - No urine in six to eight hours in an infant younger than 1 year old
 - No urine in more than eight hours in a child older than 1 year old
 - No tears when crying
 - Sunken eyes
 - Dry lips and mouth
- Refuses to drink.
- Looks or acts sick.
- Complains of pain.

Also call if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks and feels.

When can my child return to daycare or school?

Your child can return to school when he is fever-free without medicine for 24 hours and is feeling better.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.