

Breathe easy about colds and allergies



Children'sSM
Healthcare of Atlanta
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Tips for school nurses

A cold is a viral infection of the upper respiratory tract, which includes the nose, sinuses, throat and upper airway. Colds are not caused by cold weather or being outside in the rain.

What are the symptoms of a cold?

- Aches and pains
- Dry, hacking cough with little mucus production
- Fatigue
- Fever, vomiting and loose stools (more common in younger children)
- Nasal congestion
- Runny nose
- Watery eyes
- Weakened sense of taste and smell

How long does a cold last?

Symptoms usually occur one to three days after exposure to a cold virus. Most colds last between five and seven days. Symptoms are worse during the first three to four days.

How does a cold spread?

A cold is contagious and spreads mostly by hand contact or droplets in the air after coughing or sneezing. Because there are about 200 viruses that cause colds, most healthy children get at least six colds a year.

How is the spread of colds reduced?

- Encourage covering nose and mouth with a tissue or elbow during cough or sneeze.
- Wash or sanitize hands frequently.
- Wipe frequently handled objects and surfaces (i.e., door knobs, faucets) with sanitized wipes during the day.

How is a cold managed?

- Rest
- Medicines like acetaminophen to help aches and pains
- Drinking plenty of fluids

Children should stay home if they have a fever, hacking cough or if they are uncomfortable being at school. Make sure children wash their hands throughout the day and dispose of used tissues quickly. Teach children to sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbows if they do not have a tissue. This allows the child to cover his mouth without using his hands.

What is an allergy?

An allergy is also called allergic rhinitis. It is a condition of the nose caused by exposure to airborne allergens. Allergens can include pet dander (fur), dust, mold and pollen. Allergies can happen any time of year, but most children get allergies during certain seasons.

What are the symptoms of an allergy?

- Clear, watery drainage from the nose
- Coughing
- Dark, under-eye circles
- Itchy nose and eyes
- Loud mouth breathing
- Nasal congestion
- Popping of the ears
- Red, watery eyes
- Repeated throat clearing
- Sneezing attacks

How is an allergy treated?

- Avoiding allergic triggers
- Drinking plenty of fluids
- Keeping windows closed
- Taking antihistamines as directed by a doctor
- Talking with a doctor about ways to prevent symptoms
- Using a dehumidifier

A warning about colds and allergies:

Call a parent and doctor if a child begins to have respiratory issues such as fast breathing, tightness in the chest or wheezing. Call 911 if the child is lethargic, if their lips turn blue or gray or if you see other symptoms of breathing difficulty.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice. Always consult with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.



Visit choa.org, mayoclinic.com or lungusa.org
for more information.