

# Viral Illness

Patient and Family Education

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**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of 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 virus and bacteria?

- 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. Give your child lots of fluids. He may also eat if he feels well enough.
- Give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or less costly store brand) 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**

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## **How can I keep the virus from spreading?**

- Have your child avoid close contact with others.
- Make sure that you and your child wash your hands often and well for 20 seconds.
- Do not share toothbrushes, eating utensils or kiss on the lips.

## **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:
  - No urine in 6 hours in a baby 12 months and younger
  - No urine in more than 8 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 or 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.**