

Caring for your sick child at home

There are over [200 different cold viruses](#), and the average child gets about 6-8 colds a year with stuffy noses, sneezing, fever, and cough. Here are some tips for caring for your sick child at home and knowing when to call the doctor.

Keep your child home

Experts recommend that you keep your child home sick if they have the following:

- Fever in the last 24 hours
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Persistent coughing
- A new rash
- Severe pain (sore throat, earache, headache, etc.)

These could be signs of a contagious illness, like strep throat, the flu, or even COVID-19. Even if your child's symptoms aren't severe, staying home to rest can help your child get better sooner and avoid spreading germs to others. When in doubt, keep your child home!

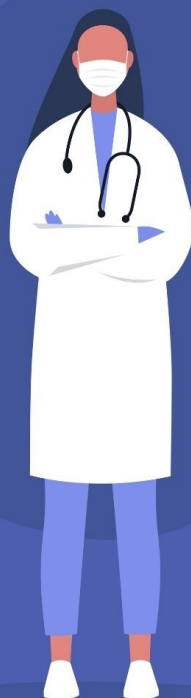


Symptoms worthy of seeking medical care:

- Fever that does not respond to fluids, rest and fever-reducing medications.
- Extreme fatigue.
- Confusion.
- Headache that does not go away.
- Chest pain.
- Labored breathing and a persistent cough.
- Neck stiffness.
- Stomach pain.
- Back pain.
- Weak legs or feet.
- Severe muscle pain.

Additionally for children:

- Vomiting and dehydration (decreased urination and no tears when crying).
- Inconsolable irritability.



Trust Your Instincts

There are many things you can do at home to help your sick child feel more comfortable. However, if at-home remedies don't seem to be enough, your child's symptoms do not improve after two full days, or if you have any concerns about your child's health, trust your instincts and contact your child's doctor. Seeing the doctor sooner rather than later can often prevent an illness from getting worse or becoming a more severe disease.

[Samaritan Health Services:](#)
[Know When to Seek Care for Colds & Flu](#)

Offer extra attention

Being sick is uncomfortable, and your child may be worried or upset because of how they feel. You can help by giving them extra attention and comfort. Here are a few ideas:

- **Be there.** Holding, cuddling, and sitting with your child can help make them comfortable. Your presence helps them feel calmer and more secure.
- **Distract them** from their discomfort with quiet games, coloring books, audiobooks, and screen time.
- **Talk to them about illness.** Explain in simple words what is happening in their body and that they will feel better soon.



Use medications cautiously

The American Academy of Pediatrics says: Oral over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold medicines can cause serious harm to young children. The risk of using these medicines is higher than any help they might have in reducing cold symptoms.



- **Under age 4:** Over-the-counter cough and cold medicine is not recommended for babies and young children.
- **From ages 4 to 6 years:** Cough medicine should be used only if recommended by your child's doctor.
- **After age 6:** Cough medicines are safe to use. Just be sure to follow the instructions on the package about the right amount of medication to give.
- **After giving your child medicine, put the medication container away and out of reach of children.**

Tips for stuffy or runny noses

Stuffy and runny noses are typical cold symptoms that frequently affect little ones. Here are some tips to help your child breathe easier:

- Raise the head of your child's bed. Put a pillow underneath the head of the mattress or raise the legs at the head of the bed.
- Try saline drops. One of the safest ways to help clear a child's congestion is with a saline (salt water) spray or nose drops. These products are available without a prescription. If you use drops, place two drops in each nostril to loosen the mucus inside.
- Clear out the mucus. Offer your toddler lots of tissues and encourage them to blow their nose. If your baby is too young to blow her nose, use a saline spray and a nasal aspirator to get mucus out of her nose.
- Use a cold vapor humidifier. Humidifiers add moisture to the air and help relieve stuffy noses. Make sure you follow the directions on the humidifier label and clean it as directed.

Tips for managing fevers

A fever is a sign that your child's immune system is fighting off the infection. Although not every fever needs to be treated, there are some things you can do to help make your child more comfortable.



- Help your child rest. Your child doesn't have to stay in bed, but they shouldn't run around and overexert themselves.
- Make sure your child drinks fluids frequently. Dehydration can make matters worse when your child is sick. Prevent dehydration by offering water, diluted fruit juices, commercially prepared oral electrolyte solutions, Jell-O, Popsicles, soups and broths, etc.
- Cool them off with a cold compress or lukewarm bath.
- Dress them in one layer of light, comfortable clothing and offer a light blanket.
- Give fever-reducing medicine. If needed, [acetaminophen](#) or [ibuprofen](#) can be safely used to treat fever or pain. Be sure to follow the instructions on the label and measure carefully based on your child's weight, not her age. Always call your pediatrician before giving medicine to a child under two years of age, and call immediately if your child is under three months of age and has a fever.

Tips for soothing coughs and sore throats

Cough, sore throat, and runny nose often happen together. Try all the tips above and:

- Offer cold drinks and popsicles to help relieve a sore throat and cough.
- Offer a spoonful of honey before bed to coat the throat and help with the soreness. Only give honey to kids older than one year old. In babies younger than one year old, honey can cause botulism, a life-threatening illness.
- Consider cough drops instructions on the package for children four and older. Follow the instructions on the package, and do not give more than the recommended dose.
- Try a vapor rub. For children ages two years and older: Smooth on a thick layer on the skin on the chest and throat area.

Is it COVID-19, flu, RSV or the common cold?

COVID-19 Onset after exposure: 2–14 days

Not everyone gets the same symptoms, or any symptoms.

Abdominal pain • Congestion • Coughing • Diarrhea • Fatigue • Fever (brief episodes) • Headache • Muscle or body aches • Nausea or vomiting • New loss of taste or smell • Shortness of breath • Sore throat

Flu Onset after exposure: 1–4 days

Unlike COVID-19, usually comes on very suddenly.

Your child may feel perfectly fine one day and be sick the next.

Chills • Fatigue • Fever • Headache • Loss of appetite • Malaise • Muscle aches • Nausea • Runny nose • Sore throat

RSV Onset after exposure: 4–6 days, in stages (not all at once)

Common cause of wheezing in kids under 2.

In older kids, symptoms may not appear any different than the cold.

Coughing • Decreased appetite • Fever • Runny nose • Sneezing • Wheezing

Common cold Onset after exposure: 2–3 days

Coughing • Runny or stuffy nose • Sore throat

Remember, there's no way to know for sure without a test. If you're at high risk for serious COVID-19 or the flu, get tested.



More Information

- [It's RSV Season! A Pediatrician Shares Everything You Need to Know](#)
Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is a long name for a very common virus that causes coughs and colds. It spreads quickly through daycares and schools. This illness can be like an annoying cold in older children and caregivers, but it can be very serious in infants.
- [10 Common Childhood Illnesses and Their Treatments](#)
The following information from the AAP lists some of the most common childhood illnesses and their approved treatments.
- [A Parent's Guide to Calling the Doctor](#)
Every day thousands of parents are confronted with minor and major health issues concerning their children. How do you know when your child's problem is one you can handle at home? When should you call the doctor? What information does the pediatrician need?

Where To Go For Care

PRIMARY CARE

When provider's office is open:

- Cold, flu or sinus pain
- Sprain
- Rashes and minor burns
- Sore throat
- Ear pain
- Animal or insect bite
- Fever over 101.5

WALK-IN/ URGENT CARE

When provider's office is closed:

- Cold, flu or sinus pain
- Sprain
- Rashes and minor burns
- Sore throat
- Ear pain
- Animal or insect bite
- Fever over 101.5

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

All times of the day:

- Sudden shortness of breath
- Intense chest pain
- Severe and sudden stomach pain
- Broken bone
- Severe burn or bleeding
- Crushing intense headache
- Open wounds

REMEMBER, if you have a medical emergency, go to your nearest emergency room or call 911.



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