

## **TIPS FOR COLD AND FLU**

### **When to keep your child home**

#### **Fever**

If your child's temperature is 37.8/100.0 F degrees or higher, keep your child at home. While at home, encourage drinking plenty of liquids. Your child should be fever-free for 24 hours (without medicine) before returning to school.

#### **Mild Cough/Runny Nose**

If there's no fever, and the child feels fairly good, school is fine.

#### **Bad Cough/Cold Symptoms**

Children with bad coughs need to stay home, and possibly see a doctor. It could be a severe cold or possibly bronchitis, flu, or pneumonia. But when the cough improves, and the child is feeling better, then it's back to school. Don't wait for the cough to disappear entirely -- that could take a week or longer!

#### **Diarrhea or Vomiting**

Keep your child home until the illness is over, and for 24 hours after the last episode (without medicine).

#### **Sore Throat**

A minor sore throat is usually not a problem, but a severe sore throat could be strep throat even if there is no fever. Other symptoms of strep throat in children are headache and stomach upset. Keep your child home from school, and contact a doctor. Your child needs a special test to determine if it is strep throat. He or she can return to school 24 hours after antibiotic treatment begins.

#### **Earache**

The child needs to see a doctor.

#### **Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)**

Keep the child home until a doctor has given the OK to return to school. Pink eye is highly contagious and most cases are caused by a virus, which will not respond to an antibiotic. Bacterial conjunctivitis will require an antibiotic; your doctor will be able to determine if this is the case.

#### **Rash**

Children with a skin rash should see a doctor, as this could be one of several infectious diseases. One possibility is impetigo, a bacterial skin infection that is very contagious and requires antibiotic treatment. Also, fifth disease is a contagious viral illness spread by coughs and sneezes; it's no longer contagious by the time rash appears.

## **Colds and the Flu**

### **How can I tell if I have a cold or the flu?**

Although the common cold and the flu share many similar symptoms, they are two different conditions.

The symptoms of a cold develop slowly and can include:

- Fever up to 39.0/102 degrees
- Runny or stuffy nose (often with green or yellow-colored discharge)
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Sneezing
- Fatigue and muscle aches
- Headache
- Watery eyes

Cold symptoms are generally more mild than flu symptoms.

Flu symptoms usually appear very suddenly and can include:

- Fever **over** 39.0 ( 102 F)
- Stuffy nose
- Nausea
- Chills and sweats
- Fatigue and muscle aches, especially in your back, arms and legs
- Cough
- Headache
- Loss of appetite

## What causes colds and the flu?

Viruses cause the common cold and the flu. Over 200 different viruses can cause colds. There are not as many viruses that cause the flu. That's why there's a shot for the flu and not for colds.

## What can I do to feel better?

There's no cure for the common cold. All you can do to feel better is treat your symptoms while your body fights off the virus (see the box below).

For the flu, your doctor will probably recommend that you treat the symptoms until you feel better. In severe cases, your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medicine. Antiviral medicines can shorten the length of time you are sick with the flu. These medicines come as pills or as an inhaler. The inhaled type may cause problems for some people with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

## Ways to treat your cold and flu symptoms

- Get plenty of rest, especially while you have a fever.
- Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke, which can make cold symptoms worse.
- Drink lots of fluids like water and clear soups. Fluids help loosen mucus. Fluids are also important because they help prevent dehydration.
- Gargle with warm salt water a few times a day to relieve a sore throat. Throat sprays or lozenges may also help relieve the pain.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Use saline (salt water) nose drops to help loosen mucus and moisten the tender skin in your nose.

## What over-the-counter medicine can I take for a cold or the flu?

No over-the-counter medicine can cure a cold or the flu. Medicine can, however, help relieve some of your cold or flu symptoms. Check with your health care provider before giving any medicine to children

Many cold/flu products are available without a prescription. See the box below for a guide to the common ingredients in these products.

## What's in over-the-counter cold/flu medicines?

The ingredients listed below are found in many cold/flu medicines. Read labels carefully. If you have questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

- **Analgesics** relieve aches and pains and reduce fever. Examples include acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, ketoprofen and naproxen. **Warning: Children and teenagers shouldn't be given aspirin because it can cause Reye's Syndrome.**
- **Antitussives** tells your brain to stop coughing. Don't take an antitussive if you're coughing up mucus.
- **Expectorants** help thin mucus so it can be coughed up more easily.
- **Oral decongestants** shrink the nasal passages and reduce congestion.

## Should I call my doctor?

In most cases, you don't need to see your doctor when you have a cold or the flu. However, if you have any of the symptoms in the box below, call your doctor.

### Emergency Cold/Flu Symptoms:

In children:

- High (above 103 degrees) fever, or a fever that lasts for more than 3 days
- Symptoms that last for more than 10 days
- Trouble breathing, fast breathing or wheezing
- Bluish skin color
- Earache or drainage from the ear
- Changes in mental state (such as not waking up, irritability or seizures)
- Flu-like symptoms that improve, but return with a fever and a worse cough
- Worsening of chronic medical condition (such as diabetes or heart disease)

In adults:

- A high, prolonged fever (above 102 degrees)
- Symptoms that last for more than 10 days or get worse instead of better
- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Fainting or feeling like you are about to faint
- Confusion or disorientation
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Severe pain in your face or forehead
- Hoarseness, sore throat or a cough that won't go away after 10 days

## Can I prevent catching a cold or the flu?

You can reduce your risk of catching a cold or the flu by washing your hands frequently, which stops the spread of germs. Eating healthy, exercising and getting enough sleep also play a part in preventing colds and the flu because they help boost your immune system.

The best way to avoid getting the flu is to get the influenza vaccine. You should get the vaccine when it becomes available each fall (in October or November), but you can also get it any time throughout the flu season (into December, January and beyond). The vaccine is available by shot or by nasal spray. The vaccines work by exposing your immune system to the flu virus. Your body will build up antibodies to the virus to protect you from getting the flu. The flu shot contains dead viruses. The nasal-spray vaccine contains live but weakened viruses. You cannot get the flu from the flu shot or the nasal-spray vaccine.

Some people who get the vaccine will still get the flu, but they will usually get a milder case than people who aren't vaccinated. The vaccine is especially recommended for people who are more likely to get really sick from flu-related complications.

If you are sick, make sure that you cover your mouth when you cough and wash your hands often to prevent giving your cold or flu to others.