



Child and Adolescent Health Specialists, PC

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COLDS / UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS (URI)

DEFINITION:

- Runny or stuffy nose
- Usually associated with fever and sore throat
- Sometimes associated with a cough, hoarseness, red eyes, and swollen lymph nodes in the neck

CAUSE:

A cold or URI is a viral infection of the nose and throat. The cold viruses are spread from one person to another by hand contact, coughing, and sneezing – not by cold air or drafts. Since there are up to 200 cold viruses, most healthy children get at least six colds each year.

EXPECTED COURSE:

Usually the fever lasts less than 3 days, and all nose and throat symptoms are gone by 7-10 days. A cough may last 2-3 weeks. The main things to watch for are secondary bacterial infections such as ear infections, yellow drainage from the eyes, sinus pressure or pain (often indicating a sinus infection), or difficulty breathing (often caused by pneumonia). In young infants, a blocked nose can interfere so much with the ability to suck that dehydration can occur.

HOME CARE:

Not much can be done to affect how long a cold lasts. However, we can relieve many of the symptoms.

The best treatment for a runny nose with profuse discharge is clearing the nose by suctioning or blowing. For younger babies, use a soft rubber suction bulb to remove the secretions gently. Nasal discharge is the nose's way of eliminating viruses. Medicine is not helpful unless your child has a nasal allergy.

Treatment for a nose blocked with dried yellow-green mucus is nasal washes (warm water or saline nose drops and suctioning). Blowing the nose or suctioning alone cannot remove most dry secretions. Place three drops of warm water or normal saline in each nostril while your child is lying on his/her back. After 1 minute, use a soft rubber suction bulb to gently suck out the loosened mucus or have your older child blow his/her nose. This can be repeated at least 4 times per day or whenever your child cannot breathe through the nose.

The main errors in using nose drops include: not using enough water or saline, not waiting long enough for the

secretions to loosen up, and not repeating the procedure until the breathing is easy. Obviously, putting in nose drops without suctioning or blowing the nose afterward is of little value.

It is particularly important to clear the nose of a young infant who cannot breathe through the mouth and suck on something at the same time. If your infant is breast- or bottle-feeding, you must clear the nose so he/she can breathe while sucking. Clearing the nasal passages is also important before putting your infant down to sleep.

TREATMENT OF ASSOCIATED SYMPTOMS:

- Fever: Use acetaminophen or, if your child is over 6 months old, ibuprofen for aches or mild fever.
- Sore throat: Use hard candies for children over 4 years old and warm chicken broth for children over 1 year old.
- Runny nose: If the nose is very runny, consider an antihistamine (such as chlorpheniramine) if your child is over 2 years old.
- Stuffy nose: Consider an oral decongestant if your child is over 2 years old. Avoid oral decongestants if they make your child jittery or keep him/her from sleeping at night.
- Cough: Use cough drops for children over 4 years old. Run a cool mist humidifier.
- Red eyes: Rinse frequently with wet cotton balls or cool compresses.
- Poor appetite: Encourage fluids of the child's choice.

CALL OUR OFFICE IMMEDIATELY IF:

- Breathing becomes difficult and no better after you clear the nose.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

CALL OUR OFFICE WITHIN 24 HOURS IF:

- The fever lasts more than 3 days.
- The nasal discharge lasts more than 10 days.
- The eyes develop a yellow discharge.
- There is any suggestion of an earache or sinus pain.
- You have other questions or concerns.