

What is a cold?

A cold is a mild infection of the upper respiratory system. There are many different types of viruses that can cause colds, but the most common is a rhinovirus. Most adults contract at least 2-3 colds a year, and children often have more, especially in their first two years.

What are the symptoms of a cold?

Cold symptoms start gradually, and can include runny and stuffy noses, sore throat, coughing, sneezing, mild body aches, and, rarely a mild to moderate fever.* Symptoms usually last from 7 to 10 days. Young children with colds may develop an ear infection secondary to the cold itself.

Symptoms of colds and flu (influenza) are quite similar; however the flu is generally worse than the cold and symptoms such as fever, chills, sharp headache, body aches, dry cough, and extreme tiredness are more severe.

For a comparison of flu and cold symptoms, visit [Cold Versus Flu | CDC](#)

How are colds spread?

Colds are easily spread from person to person through the air by coughing or sneezing. Surfaces and hands contaminated with nose, mouth, or throat secretions can also spread cold viruses.

How are colds treated?

There is no cure for the common cold. Measures such as getting enough rest, eating healthy foods, and drinking plenty of fluids can help relieve the symptoms of a cold. Cold medications, which may help with the symptoms of a cold, are not recommended for children under the age of 4. *Never give aspirin to a child*, as this has been associated with Reye Syndrome.

How can the spread of colds be reduced?

- Make sure adults and children wash hands thoroughly and often.
- Avoid touching the eyes, mouth, or nose.
- Teach children to cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve or a tissue, not their hands. Dispose of facial tissues properly and wash hands after throwing it away.
- Avoid close contact with those who are ill.
- Use a sanitizing solution to help minimize germs on surfaces such as tabletops, counters, and toys. Mouthed toys should be washed, rinsed, and sanitized between uses by different children. Bathrooms and diaper changing pads should be properly disinfected.
- Make sure the building is well-ventilated by opening windows or adjusting the air circulation system to allow plenty of fresh air into the building.
- Assign sleeping mats and bedding to only one child and store these separately when children are in group care. Children should sleep at least 18" apart (30" for cribs) and in a head-to-foot or foot-to-foot arrangement.

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Exclude from group setting?

Because the virus can be spread even before symptoms appear, exclusion of children with colds is not generally necessary. However, if children cannot comfortably participate in the planned activities, or have symptoms requiring exclusion per the child care regulations, they should be sent home.

If illness continues beyond 10 days, if symptoms become more severe, or if a child is lethargic with symptoms, seeking consultation with a health professional is advised.

Handwashing

Handwashing is one of the primary ways to stop the spread of disease. The following steps are recommended for good handwashing:

1. Turn on water (warm water should be used.)
2. Apply soap to hands.
3. Rub soap over tops and palms of hands and around fingernails. Scrub hands for approximately 20 seconds.
4. Rinse hands with running water.
5. Dry hands with a clean, disposable towel.

* Fever is defined as a temperature above 101°F (38.3°C) by any method or above 100.4°F (38.0°C) for infants younger than 2 months old.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics

- Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 4th ed.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Website)

- Common Colds: Protect Yourself and Others (Accessed December 2020).

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Child Care Health Outreach Program

3020 Rucker Avenue, Suite 104 ■ Everett, WA 98201-3900 ■ fax: 425.339.5254 ■ tel: 425.252.5415