Coughs and colds in young children

Information for parents

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

This leaflet tells you about cough and colds.

Coughs and colds are usually caused by viral infections. They are very common in colder weather and winter periods.

What causes coughs and colds?

Most coughs and colds are caused by a virus. Many different viruses can infect the nose and throat. They are passed on by coughing and sneezing the virus into the air. When a child starts school they can expect to have 6 - 8 coughs or colds a year. Sometimes it seems that they have a cough or cold one after another. A child who lives with people who smoke has an increased risk of catching coughs and colds.

The best way to stop spreading these viruses is to:

- always carry tissues
- use a tissue or hand to cover your nose every time you cough or sneeze
- use the tissues once and throw them in the bin
- wash or clean your hands regularly, and soon after a cough or sneeze.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are a cough, and a runny nose. The cough is often worse at night. A child who is coughing will not choke or stop breathing. Coughing will not damage their lungs, sometimes your child may vomit (be sick) during or after coughing.

Your child may also have a raised temperature (fever), a sore throat, headache, feel tired and may be off their food. Your child could also have dulled hearing or earache caused by a build up of mucus (thick fluid) behind the ear drums.

What are the treatments for coughs and colds?

There is no magic cure. The symptoms tend to be worse in the first 2 - 3 days, and then usually ease gradually over the next few days. An irritating cough may linger for up to 2 - 4 weeks.
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You should:

- give your child **plenty of fluids to drink**
- **seek medical advice** if your child is under 3 months old
- give paracetamol, for example, Calpol, Disprol, Medinol or a supermarket’s or pharmacist's (chemist) own brand, if your child is over 3 months old.

Paracetamol can be given every 4 – 6 hours.

**Do not give more than 4 doses in 24 hours.**

You must always follow the instructions provided in the leaflet supplied with your medication.

- give ibuprofen if your child is over 6 months old. Ibuprofen can be given by itself or may be used with, or in between doses of paracetamol.

**Ibuprofen must not be given to children with kidney disease.**

Ibuprofen can be given every 8 hours.

**Do not give more than 3 doses in 24 hours.**

You must always follow the instructions provided in the leaflet supplied with your medication.

You can buy cold remedies and cough mixtures in pharmacies (chemists) and supermarkets.

**Always check the ingredients as some remedies may contain paracetamol and it is important not to give more than the maximum dose. If in doubt speak to a pharmacist or doctor before giving.**

For small babies saline drops (salt water) may be useful to help clear a bunged up nose and make breathing and feeding easier.

**What complications may develop?**

Most coughs and colds get better without any complications. Sometimes a more serious bacterial infection may develop, for example, an ear infection or pneumonia.
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Things to look out for include:

- earache that gets worse or goes on for a long time
- fast breathing
- difficulty breathing
- wheezing
- chest pains
- high temperature, a temperature higher than 37.5°C (99.5°F)
- drowsiness (sleepy)
- continuous vomiting (being sick).

If you have any concerns about your child having any of these symptoms you should contact your GP.

Contact numbers

If you have any worries or concerns you should contact your GP during normal surgery hours. Outside surgery hours, you should contact your GP’s surgery for the Out of Hours Service number.

Further information is available from:

NHS Choices
telephone: 111 (when it is less urgent than 999)
Calls to this number are free from landlines and mobile phones or via the website at www.nhs.uk
This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk.

**Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints**

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we’re doing well or if there’s anything which we can improve, that’s why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

- telephone: 01642 624719
- Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 4.00 pm
- Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

- freephone: 0800 092 0084
- Mobile: (can use text): 0779 561 883
- Email: patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

- telephone: 01642 617617
- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm.

**Data Protection and use of patient information**

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Head of Communications.

- telephone: 01642 624339 or www.dataprotection.gov.uk