



Source CIUSSS MCQ

# The common cold in babies or children

The common cold in children is caused by a virus. On average, children catch 5 to 6 colds per year and sometimes more if they attend daycare. The common cold is an upper respiratory infection that is expected to clear up after 10 to 14 days.

The common cold should not be mistaken for the flu, which is characterized by a high fever, cough, headache, fatigue, body aches, nausea, vomiting, stomachache, diarrhea and sore throat.

## Possible cold symptoms

- Runny nose;
- Nasal congestion (*see file Nasal hygiene*);
- Sneezing;
- Mild fever over 38.0 °C (100.4 °F); (*Rectal temperature taking remains the most reliable*)
- Slight sore throat;
- Irritability or crying;
- Lost of appetite.

## How to prevent it?

- Have your child vaccinated according to the vaccination schedule.
- Wash their hands frequently or encourage them to wash their hands after blowing their nose or touching their face and before eating or drinking.
- Make your child's environment smoke-free.
- Avoid going to large gatherings with your newborn when it is not essential.

## How to relieve the symptoms?

- Keep the humidity level in the house between 40 and 50%.
- Let your child rest.
- Make sure your child drinks frequently and in small amounts (e.g., water or milk).
- Encourage your child to blow their nose often if they are able to do so.
- Clear the baby's or child's nose (nasal hygiene) with a solution (at least 4 times a day and even more if necessary for babies). (*See sheet Nasal hygiene*)
- Make sure your child drinks or eats before nap time and before bedtime.
- Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to reduce fever and pain. You can give acetaminophen to your child if he or she is older than 3 months. Follow the dosage, amount and dosing interval recommended on the product label, based on your child's weight. Avoid giving ibuprofen to your child if they are under 6 months old or unable to hydrate by themselves.
- If you are unsure, consult your pharmacist or dial 811 for Info-Santé.

## Caution!

- Avoid cough medicines if your child is under 6 years old.
- Avoid decongestants and antihistamines, which are not considered effective for the common cold.

- Never give acetylsalicylic acid or ASA to a child or teenager.

### Why are antibiotics not recommended for the common cold?

- Colds are caused by viruses.
- Antibiotics do not treat viruses.
- The alternative treatments described in section *How to relieve the symptoms* may be sufficient.
- Taking antibiotics can cause side effects and contribute to the development of antibiotic resistance.

### When to consult?

- If your child's symptoms have persisted for at least 14 days without improvement.
- If your child refuses to eat and drink.

- If your child's symptoms had improved, but are starting again or getting worse.
- If your child has excessive salivation or trouble swallowing.
- If there is a persistent cough with increased secretions.

### When to go to the ER URGENTLY?

- If your child is less than 3 months old and has a fever over 38 °C (100.4 °F) when taken rectally.
- If your child has significant difficulty breathing (respiratory distress).
- If the child's behaviour is unusual (excessive crying, amorphous, hard to wake up, irritable, agitated, etc.).



### For more information

- [Explanatory sheets and videos: ciusssmcq.ca/conseils-sante/vous-etes-malade/](https://ciusssmcq.ca/conseils-sante/vous-etes-malade/)
- [INSPQ : colds and flu](#)
- [Upper respiratory tract infections: sheet from the Centre hospitalier universitaire Sainte-Justine](#)

### Contact information for medical clinics

- [CIUSSS MCQ website: facility contact information](#)

### Where to consult

- Your pharmacist
- Info-Santé 811 available at all times: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Your family doctor at your FMG or medical clinic
- If you do not have a physician: 1-844-313-2029, option 1. From 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday to Friday and from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Saturdays, Sundays and holidays
- Walk-in clinics
- Your nearest emergency room (See above *information When to go to the ER URGENTLY?*)

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