

# The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

## GOT A COLD?:

### Keep Your Family From Becoming Antibiotic Resistant

**T**he cold is the most common illness in the U.S. Catching a cold is such a fact of life that most people expect they'll get one or two every year. Although colds and flu infections usually are not considered serious illnesses, they are inconvenient and can disrupt our everyday lives. You may miss several work days each year because of colds and other upper respiratory illnesses. You may also miss additional work because you have to stay home with a child with a cold or the flu. The average adult has two to four colds a year; children have as many as 10.



throats, sinusitis, and pharyngitis. All of these conditions are caused by viruses, which are tiny, invisible germs. They are shared through direct contact with another person, through the air, or by touching surfaces with the virus on it. Colds are typically passed to others by touching doorknobs or other objects with the virus on it, sharing drinks

or utensils with someone with a cold, or just being in close contact with someone who has the cold virus.

Viruses get into healthy cells in the body and spread rapidly. Cold viruses are hard to treat because there are more than 200 different kinds, and they are known to change forms quickly. It usually takes 10 days to a few weeks for someone to fully recover from cold symptoms. It can take longer if a cough is present. There are ways to treat the symptoms of a cold, but unfortunately, there isn't a cure. Relief and the eventual end of a cold are a matter of time.

Your child will likely get a cold or flu several times throughout a year. When that happens, you want your child to feel better as soon as possible. A stuffy nose, sneezing, coughing, fever, and sometimes a queasy stomach can make life miserable.

### A Cold is a Virus

A cold is an upper respiratory illness that takes place in the lungs, throat, ears, and nose. Other upper respiratory illnesses are flu, bronchitis, some ear infections, sore

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## Keep Your Family From Becoming Antibiotic Resistant

You may ask your child's doctor for antibiotics to help speed the recovery. Unfortunately, antibiotics do not work on cold or flu viruses.

### Viruses and Bacteria Are Different

Most common illnesses are caused by viruses or bacteria. Viruses and bacteria are very different types of germs. A cold or flu virus or other upper respiratory virus usually goes away on its own after several weeks.

Bacteria are living organisms that are everywhere in our environment. They are small, but not as small as viruses, and can be seen through a microscope. Many kinds of bacteria live in our bodies, which is normal and healthy. However, bacteria sometimes grow out of control and can cause infections and diseases. Common bacterial infections are pneumonia, some ear and severe sinus infections, urinary tract infections, skin infections, tuberculosis, tooth and gum infections, pinkeye, malaria, and E. coli infections.

Bacterial infections may get better on their own, but many will spread and get worse. Antibiotics **will** work on and treat most bacterial infections. It is important that bacterial infections be treated with antibiotics because these types of infections are generally more serious and can be life-threatening.

### Use Antibiotics the Right Way

Many people believe antibiotics are a remedy or cure for almost any illness, but that is not true. Antibiotics can work very well in destroying and preventing certain bacteria from growing.

#### Best Ways Stop Colds and Flu at Home

Wash your hands and help your children wash their hands

- often and thoroughly throughout the day -
- with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.

Disinfect surfaces and materials when someone in your home has the cold or flu to prevent spreading of the virus.

However, antibiotics do not work on viruses, including the common cold, flu or typical seasonal related illnesses. Therefore, it is important to **not** treat these viruses with antibiotics.

Overuse and misuse of antibiotics is a great health concern. Using antibiotics for conditions that they do not treat are making people resistant. Once you take an antibiotic, your body starts to build an immunity - or resistance - to it. After too many doses, the antibiotic simply doesn't work anymore. This can be very dangerous if you develop a serious bacterial infection, such as pneumonia or staph infection (an infection that develops in open wounds), and the common antibiotics to treat it won't work.

When you become resistant to antibiotics, it affects you and others. Some diseases and infections once thought to be under control or wiped-out are now reappearing (and can be spread more easily) due to an increase in antibiotic resistance.

Antibiotics should only be used when they are necessary or when they can be effective. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) shows that upper respiratory illnesses account for 75 percent of all antibiotics prescribed by office-based physicians. In addition, more than 10 million courses of antibiotics are

## Keep Your Family From Becoming Antibiotic Resistant

prescribed each year for viral conditions that do not benefit from antibiotics. Unfortunately, sometimes doctors feel pressure from parents who want an antibiotic to help their children who have a sore throat or severe cold to feel better quickly. **Only your doctor can determine what kind of infection you or your children have and how to treat it.**

Antibiotic resistance is now a leading campaign of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The *Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work* is a national campaign to reduce the rate of the rise of antibiotic resistance. It helps by making you and your doctor aware of the increased dangers of using antibiotics for upper respiratory and viral infections.

### How Not to Become Antibiotic Resistant

The best way to prevent antibiotic resistance is to use antibiotics only when prescribed by your doctor and only when necessary. If a condition will go away on its own without antibiotics, it is recommended to wait it out.

Here are some other recommended practices:

- Do not take or give your children antibiotics for the cold, flu, coughs, or ear aches unless your doctor determines the symptoms are due to an infection caused by bacteria.
- If you or your child get a cold, treat the symptoms but let the illness run its course. If your child is younger than 7 years old, check with your doctor before giving a cold medicine.
- When you or your child take an antibiotic, take the full prescribed dosage. Do not skip doses. Do not stop taking it even when you or your child start to feel better or the symptoms go away.

- Throw away any unused portions of the antibiotic when you are done taking the prescribed amounts.
- Do not give antibiotics prescribed for you or your child to another person.
- Do not demand antibiotics from your doctor when it is determined they will not help.

**Getting a cold or flu or having a sore throat or ear infection is no fun. Children get cranky, weepy, and irritable. The best way to help your child feel better with these kinds of viral illnesses is to treat his or her symptoms:**

- Fever:** Give plenty of liquids throughout the day. Ask your doctor if a fever reducer is needed.
- Discomfort:** Make sure your child is cool and comfortable. Room temperature should not be too hot. Use a humidifier if your child's nose is stuffy.
- Sneezing, Coughing, Sore Throat:** Have plenty of tissues ready. Give foods that are easy on the throat. Ask your doctor if it is okay to give your child over-the-counter medications for these symptoms.

### Smile & Remember: No Cure For The Common Cold

A man went to see his doctor because he was suffering from a miserable cold. His doctor prescribed some pills, but they didn't help.

On his next visit the doctor gave him a shot, but that didn't do any good.

On his third visit the doctor told the man to go home and take a hot bath. As soon as he was finished bathing he was to throw open all the windows and stand in the draft.

"But doc," protested the patient, "if I do that, I'll get pneumonia."

"I know," said his physician. "I can cure pneumonia."

## Keep Your Family From Becoming Antibiotic Resistant

We can't escape the fact that sooner or later we will come down with the cold or flu. Luckily, for most of us, it won't be serious. But when children get sick, we know it is a big deal for them. The best way to help your child with the cold or flu is to use common sense and know that in a few days the symptoms will get better.

### For More Information

- ▶ **Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work Campaign**, 800-CDC-INFO, 800-232-4636, [www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/know-and-do.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/know-and-do.htm). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website contains information for parents about what they can do to protect themselves and their children from antibiotic resistance. Information and materials in both English and Spanish.

- ▶ **Parenting Corner, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)**, [www.aap.org/publiced/BR\\_Antibiotics.htm](http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_Antibiotics.htm), gives a brief overview about safe use of antibiotics. The site is full of practical information for parents about common illnesses of children, what to do, and how to access community resources.

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