

Patient Information

Recurrent Coughs and Colds in Children

Children's Services



Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to explain why your child is more prone to infections than you. It also explains when your child should see a doctor.

How many coughs and colds does the average young child get per year?

The average is about eight. However, some children will get fewer and some will get more.

How long can I expect a cough or cold to last?

The average length of time is about four days with fever and then a further 4-7 days with a cough and runny nose.

However, many children (particularly those with a mild asthmatic tendency) may tend to cough for some 6-8 weeks after each viral cough and cold. It is therefore possible for your child to spend most of the winter coughing in response to only 3 or 4 viruses if each one occurs just as they are getting better from the first one.

Why do children get so many coughs and colds?

There are so many different viruses which can cause coughs and colds and if your child has not met the virus before then the child may become infected and experience a relatively minor cough or cold. Catching infections when young is an important part of growing up.

Is your child weakened by coughs and colds?

Your child will be unwell during the time they have the cough and cold. However, following the cough and cold your child will develop an immunity to that virus. This means the next time your child meets that virus they will not be infected.

How long do children carry on getting recurrent infections?

Up to the age of five children can, on average, get an infection every 4-6 weeks. As children get older, they build up immunity and are usually better able to deal with an infection. The years under five are definitely worst for recurrent infection, particularly if there are two or more children in a family or attending nursery.

Why do children get so many more infections than adults?

This is because adults have developed immunity to many more viruses. It's quite likely you had the same problem as a child.

When should my child see a doctor when they have a cough or cold?

The three most important things are: Behaviour, Breathing and Temperature.

Behaviour—

It is normal for a child with a cold not to eat and to lack energy. See a doctor promptly if your child stops drinking or stops walking around and is very subdued.

Breathing—

See a doctor promptly if your child has difficulty with breathing or the breathing rate becomes very fast i.e. over 30 breaths per minute. Although this in itself is not dangerous, it may indicate that there is an underlying infection which may need treatment.

Temperature—

If your child has a temperature above 39 degrees then your doctor should be consulted. Additionally the use of Paracetamol (Calpol, Disprol etc) is recommended at the dose stated on the package. Always read the label.

When should my child see a doctor when they have a fever?

Generally children get fevers because they have a virus. If your child has a virus then he or she will get better without any specific treatment and all you need to do is keep them drinking plenty and keep the temperature down.

Occasionally children may get a bacterial infection. In such cases they will require antibiotics. You will usually know if this is the case because they will be more unwell and will not be getting better as quickly as usual. See a doctor if you continue to be worried about your child.

Further information

NHS 111

☎ 111

or Contact your GP

NHS website - www.nhs.uk

Useful Telephone Numbers

Bluebell Ward, Lister Hospital
Stevenage

☎ 01438 284008

Children's Emergency Department
Lister Hospital

☎ 01438 284333

Urgent Care Centre, New QEII
Welwyn Garden City

☎ 01707 247549

Community Children's Nursing Team

☎ 01438 288370

Date of publication: June 2019 Date of publication: February 2014 www.arts-tr.nhs.uk

Author: Paediatric Information Leaflet Group

Reference: CH/112L Version: 6 (July 2019)

Review Date: July 2022

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