

Patient Information

Tonsillitis in children

Ears, Nose and Throat Department



What is tonsillitis?

Tonsillitis is an infection of the tonsils at the back of the throat, and is a common illness in children. The majority of cases in children are caused by the same group of viruses that cause the common cold, such as adenovirus and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Children who get tonsillitis generally recover well with no specific treatments.

What symptoms might my child have?

Your child may have:

- a sore throat
- a high temperature (fever)
- flu-like symptoms
- mild difficulty swallowing (especially dry or hard foods)
- bad breath
- feel sick and not feel like eating
- feel more tired than usual

Illness usually lasts between 3 to 5 days. More severe symptoms may include:

- swollen, painful glands in your child's neck
- pus filled spots or streaks on the tonsils
- hoarse voice

What can I do to help my child?

- use paracetamol and/or ibuprofen to treat your child's pain; follow the dosage instructions on the packet
- make sure your child is drinking enough fluids - cool fluids often help
- encourage your child to eat and drink
- encourage to cough or sneeze into a tissue and regular handwashing to prevent the infection from spreading

What should I look out for?

If you have any concerns or notice any of the following within 2 to 3 days of your child becoming ill, please see your child's doctor urgently or go to the Emergency Department:

- severe sore throat which rapidly worsens
- swelling inside the mouth or throat
- difficulty swallowing fluids or drooling
- difficulty opening the mouth
- difficulty breathing

What is the usual course of tonsillitis in children?

Most children recover fully with no specific treatments, although the doctor may prescribe antibiotics, anesthetic throat spray or both if they feel that these treatments are necessary.

Certain bacteria can also cause tonsillitis and these bacterial causes can be rarely associated with complications. The doctor who reviewed your child will have assessed for features of bacterial tonsillitis and may prescribe antibiotics to reduce the chance of developing these complications. However, current evidence suggests that bacterial tonsillitis will resolve without antibiotics in the majority of cases; antibiotics have been found to reduce the length of illness by less than 1 day.

Does my child need their tonsils removed?

Children may be considered for surgical removal of the tonsils (tonsillectomy) when they have multiple episodes of tonsillitis a year.

Current UK recommendations:

If a child has had seven or more episodes of tonsillitis in 1 year, or 5 episodes per year for the past 2 years they should be referred to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist. Your doctor will be able to refer a child to ENT if it is appropriate to do so.

Useful Telephone Numbers

- Switch board, Lister Hospital
☎ 01438 314333 - ask for ENT Department
- ENT Nurse Specialist (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
☎ Mobile: 0778 534 3359 or 0787 639 0290

In an emergency, dial 999 and request an ambulance or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. ☎ 111

Useful websites:

www.entuk.org

www.nhs.uk

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