Cough and Cold in Children Under 6

Tired from your crying children with colds? Want to help your child but don’t know what to do? This may help answer some of your questions.

How can I prevent the cold?
- Bundle up! Stay warm.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Stay away from people with colds.
- Use antibacterials such as hand sanitizers, especially after your child has been around other children. Also, wash their hands often.
- Eat healthy. Stay away from sugar. Eat lots of protein and food with vitamin B6. Examples of food with lots of

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protein are lean meat, poultry, fish, legumes, dairy, eggs, nuts, and seeds. Vitamin B6 can be found in turkey, beans, potatoes, spinach, and enriched cereal grains.\(^4\)

- Be well hydrated.
- Intake vitamin C by drinking orange juice. This will help the immune system. Vitamin C is also found in products like Preferred Plus Pharmacy's Children's Chewables vitamin and mineral supplement, Flintstones plus Immunity Support chewable tablets, and My First Flintstones chewable tablets.
- Probiotics in yogurt are also good for the immune system. Children who take probiotics experience significantly less cold symptoms and miss fewer days of school than children who do not take probiotics.\(^3\)

What can I give to my child to relieve his/her cough?\(^1\)

**NOTE:** do NOT use cough/cold medications for children under age 6 without consulting a doctor!

- **Humidifiers** and **vaporizers**—work equally well to add moisture to the air. They help ease coughing and congestion (replace water daily to prevent growth of bacteria and mold). The difference between them is that humidifiers release cool moisture whereas vaporizers
release warm moisture. Vaporizers boil the water first so there’s less risk of spreading bacteria in the room but it can get very hot.\(^5\)

- **Topical antitussives** (ex. Vicks VapoRub)—creates a local anesthetic sensation and a sense of improved airflow (do NOT use topicals containing camphor in children under 2 years old).
- **Honey**—increases saliva that coats their throat and relieves irritation and cough (NOT for infants under 1 year old).
- **Decaffeinated tea with honey**—if your child is old enough to handle tea, this would be a good option to help a stuffy nose feel better.
- **Lozenges/cough drops**—not for children under age 4 due to choking hazards. Most of the sore throat lozenges designed for children list pectin as their active ingredient. Lozenges with pectin as the only active ingredient are ideal for children because they taste good, have no known side effects, and soothe the throat. This can be found in lozenges made by Luden’s.\(^7\)
- **Fluid**—drink lots of fluid to stay hydrated.
- **Acetaminophen/ibuprofen**—for fever. Using different types of thermometers give a different reading. Your child has a fever if their fever reads 100.4°F rectally, 99.5°F orally, 98.6°F under the armpit, or 100°F in the ear.\(^8\)

**What are some home remedies?**\(^6\)

- **Comfort your child**—giving your child attention may calm them.
- **Chicken soup**—soothing and also easier to give your child if they lost their appetite.
- **Breathing steam from a hot shower**—can ease congestion (as long as your child does not have asthma).
• **Tell them to sleep on their sides**—if they have nasal congestion this can prevent their runny nose from falling down their throats.
• **Get plenty of rest**—let them take naps.

**Why can’t I give my child medication if they’re under age 6?**

• Many OTC cough/cold medications for toddlers and infants have been recalled (pulled off the market) because it was shown to be ineffective and more harmful than helpful. Overdose was also a problem. A few children have died from unintentional overdose.

**What if my doctor recommends it?**

• If your doctor thinks it’s the only option you should use what is recommended but you should still try all the non-medication options first.
• Please be aware that your child’s cold will not go away faster from all these options. It will just ease the symptoms. The cold will probably stick around for about 5 to 10 days regardless.

**When should I go to the doctor?**

• If your child is under 3 months old.
• If your child is under 2 years old and has had fever for more than 24 hours.
• If your child has ear pain or a severe sore throat.
• If your child has symptoms that don’t improve within 5 to 14 days.

**What can I do to be more cautious?**

• Do not give any medication to children under age 6 without talking to your doctor.

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• Do not give antihistamine products to your child to make them sleepy because it might do the opposite for children.
• Do not use products that have the same ingredients.
• Do not use a spoon from your kitchen to measure out medications. This is not an accurate measurement. Use what is provided with the medication or purchase a measuring device.
• Do not assume that taking a fraction of the adult dose is equivalent to a child’s dose. For children, dosage depends on their weight.
• Make sure your child is not getting an antibiotic for a viral infection because it will not work. Antibiotics will only treat bacteria, not viruses.
• If given an antibiotic, make sure your child finishes the medication instead of stopping the medication once they begin to feel better. Quitting antibiotics early might bring back the sickness and also build resistance to the medication.

References

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