

Breathe Easy About Colds and Allergic Rhinitis (Allergies)

A cold is a viral infection of the upper respiratory tract (nose, sinuses, throat and upper airway). It is not caused by drafts or being outside in the rain. An allergy is a congestive condition of the nose caused by exposure to indoor or outdoor airborne allergens, such as animals, dust, mold and pollen.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A COLD?

Symptoms usually occur one to three days after exposure to a cold virus and may include:

- Fatigue
- Aches and pains
- Weakened senses of taste and smell
- Congested or runny nose
- Weepy eyes and a dry hacking cough with little mucus production
- Fever, vomiting and loose stools are likely in younger children, but are possible at any age

HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

A cold may last anywhere from seven to 10 days. Symptoms are worse during the first three to four days.

HOW IS A COLD SPREAD?

A cold is contagious and is spread mostly by hand contact. Because there are about 200 viruses that cause colds, most healthy children get at least six colds a year.

HOW IS A COLD MANAGED?

Supportive care may include:

- Acetaminophen
- Rest
- Increased fluid intake

Children should stay home if a fever or continuous hacking cough is present. Children who are too uncomfortable at school also should stay home. Be sure the child washes his hands frequently and disposes of soiled tissues quickly. Teach children to sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbows when they do not have a tissue. This allows the child to cover his mouth without using his hands.

WHAT IS AN ALLERGY?

Allergic rhinitis is a congestive condition of the nose caused by exposure to indoor or outdoor airborne allergens, such as animals, dust, mold and pollen. This condition may occur during certain seasons or year-round depending on the type of allergies.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AN ALLERGY?

A child with allergic rhinitis may experience:

- Nasal congestion and sneezing attacks
- Itching of the nose and eyes
- Red, watery eyes
- Clear, watery nasal drainage
- Repeated throat clearing
- Cough
- Noisy mouth breathing
- Popping of the ears
- Dark circles under the eyes

HOW IS AN ALLERGY TREATED?

Treatment of allergic rhinitis may include:

- Avoiding allergic triggers
- Drinking plenty of fluids
- Taking antihistamines as directed by the child's doctor
- Using humidifiers
- Following up with the doctor about ways to prevent symptoms

A WARNING ABOUT COLDS AND ALLERGIES:

The parent and doctor should be called for any respiratory difficulty, fast breathing, tightness in the chest or wheezing. Call 911 if the child is very lethargic or if there is a blue or gray color to the lips along with other symptoms of breathing difficulty.

Visit www.mayoclinic.com and www.lungusa.org for more information.

This general healthcare information should not be used as a substitute or in place of contacting the child's healthcare provider. Visit www.choa.org or call 404-250-KIDS to speak to a pediatric nurse if you need further assistance.