

## Let's Talk About...

# Viral upper respiratory infections (URIs) or common colds

A viral **upper respiratory infection** (URI), also called a common cold, is a contagious illness that affects kids of all ages, especially during the winter months.

## What causes a cold?

A cold is usually caused by a virus that passes through droplets in the air or on surfaces your child touches. Your child is more likely to get a cold when the air is dry, both inside and outside, because the virus is more likely to survive in this weather.

## What are the signs of a cold?

Common signs of a cold include:

- A runny or stuffy nose
- An irritated or sore throat
- A cough
- A mild fever
- Headaches or muscle aches
- Mucus that turns yellow or green

## How is a cold diagnosed?

Your child's healthcare provider will ask about your child's symptoms and will look at their throat and ears. They may take a sample of the saliva in your child's throat (called a culture) to test for other illnesses, like strep throat (a throat infection).

The healthcare provider probably won't be able to tell you which virus is causing your child's cold. The treatment is most important.



## How is a cold treated?

There is no cure for a cold, and it will go away on its own without treatment. However, you can give your child ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) to relieve headaches and muscle aches. Having your child get lots of rest and drink plenty of fluids can also help them feel better. Hydration is very important.

If your child's healthcare provider says it's okay, you can give an older child an over-the-counter medicine to treat a sore throat and runny or stuffy nose.

**Remember: Antibiotics do not treat viruses, so your child's healthcare provider should not prescribe them.**

## How long does a cold last?

A cold usually goes away on its own within a week, but it may last a bit longer.

