

## **Your Child's Health and the Common Cold**

***Many parents often have questions about how to treat the common cold. Read below for answers to some of the most frequent questions our doctors receive.***

### **What is the common cold, and what are its symptoms?**

Colds or upper respiratory infections, as they are known, are situated in the nose and throat and are characterized by sneezing, runny nose, nasal congestion, low-grade fever, cough and sore throat. Many children get 6-10 colds each year. There are many types of viruses that cause the cold and children can get them over and over again.

### **When should I call a doctor if my child has a cold?**

Colds last seven to ten days and they often get worse before they get better. If the cold isn't getting better after seven days, if your child has severe headaches or ear pain, or if the congestion is thick, green, or yellow then you should take your child to see a doctor. If your child has a fever above 100.8 F accompanied by a sore throat, he or she may also have strep throat, which is a bacterial infection that should be treated with antibiotics. A common cold can also turn into an ear or sinus infection and even pneumonia. A cold that seems to be getting progressively worse, especially with a decreasing appetite and an increasing fever, is no longer a cold and needs a doctor's attention.

### **How should I treat a cold?**

A cold must run its course, but there are ways to ease symptoms, such as drinking lots of fluids, resting, using saline nose drops or sitting in a steam-filled bathroom to ease congestion.

### **What is Pneumonia?**

Pneumonia, an infection of the lungs, can be bacterial or viral, with varying degrees of severity. Pneumonia is typically marked by high fever, cough, difficulty breathing, decreased appetite, fatigue, and occasional abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting. Children look sick," according to Daniel Rauch, M.D., F.A.A.P., F.H.M., Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, and Associate Director of Pediatrics at Elmhurst Hospital Center in Queens. "Pneumonia can happen as a 'super-infection' where the child starts with a mild cold and then suddenly gets much sicker because the first mild illness allows a more severe bacterial infection to occur."

### **When Should I Call a Doctor?**

Your child should be evaluated by a physician if he or she has increased fever, progressive coughing or difficulty breathing. A chest x-ray may be ordered to confirm the diagnosis of pneumonia.

### **How is Pneumonia Treated?**

Bacterial pneumonia treatment starts with being appropriately vaccinated," says Dr. Rauch who points to the Hib vaccine which has virtually eliminated the bacteria that causes pneumonia and is required in New York State and Connecticut for children under the age of 5 in school or day care. If your child has not received the vaccination, or the pneumonia is believed to be bacterial, antibiotics are usually administered.

### **What is a stomach virus, and what are some common symptoms?**

Gastroenteritis - or inflammation of the stomach and intestines is an infection caused by a variety of viruses. Stomach viruses often start with vomiting which can last for 12 hours. Diarrhea usually follows and can last up to one week. The viruses are very contagious and often affect an entire family. Hand washing is the first line of defense against contracting and spreading stomach viruses. Some children may also have stomach cramps, a low-grade fever, and headaches. Rotavirus, which is characterized by extreme diarrhea and is responsible for more than 55,000 hospitalizations each year, is usually diagnosed in babies and young children.

### **When should I call the doctor?**

Dehydration is the biggest concern when your child has the stomach virus. If your child is not keeping down fluids after 24 hours and not urinating, and the lips are dry, those are signs that your child may be dehydrated and you should speak with a doctor as soon as possible.

### **How should I treat a stomach virus?**

Food and liquid should be given slowly. Stop all solids and all liquids and give your child Gatorade, weak tea, or an over-the-counter oral replacement electrolyte solution such as Pedialyte. If your child is very dehydrated, intravenous fluids and prescription anti-vomiting medicine is needed. To prevent rotavirus, the Center for Disease Control recommends parents vaccinate their children.