

Upper Respiratory Infection, Pediatric

An upper respiratory infection (URI) is a common infection of the nose, throat, and upper air passages that lead to the lungs. It is caused by a virus. The most common type of URI is the common cold.

URIs usually get better on their own, without medical treatment. URIs in children may last longer than they do in adults.

What are the causes?

A URI is caused by a virus. Your child may catch a virus by:

- Breathing in droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze.
- Touching something that has been exposed to the virus (*contaminated*) and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes.

What increases the risk?

Your child is more likely to get a URI if:

- Your child is young.
- It is autumn or winter.
- Your child has close contact with other kids, such as at school or daycare.
- Your child is exposed to tobacco smoke.
- Your child has:
 - A weakened disease-fighting (*immune*) system.
 - Certain allergic disorders.
- Your child is experiencing a lot of stress.
- Your child is doing heavy physical training.

What are the signs or symptoms?

A URI usually involves some of the following symptoms:

- Runny or stuffy (*congested*) nose.
- Cough.
- Sneezing.
- Ear pain.
- Fever.
- Headache.
- Sore throat.
- Tiredness and decreased physical activity.
- Changes in sleep patterns.
- Poor appetite.
- Fussy behavior.

How is this diagnosed?

This condition may be diagnosed based on your child's medical history and symptoms and a physical exam. Your child's health care provider may use a cotton swab to take a mucus sample from the nose (*nasal swab*). This sample can be tested to determine what virus is causing the illness.

How is this treated?

URIs usually get better on their own within 7–10 days. You can take steps at home to relieve your child's symptoms. Medicines or antibiotics cannot cure URIs, but your child's health care provider may recommend over-the-counter cold medicines to help relieve symptoms, if your child is 6 years of age or older.

Follow these instructions at home:

Medicines

- Give your child over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your child's health care provider.
- **Do not** give cold medicines to a child who is younger than 6 years old, unless his or her health care provider approves.
- Talk with your child's health care provider:
 - Before you give your child any new medicines.
 - Before you try any home remedies such as herbal treatments.
- **Do not** give your child aspirin because of the association with Reye syndrome.

Relieving symptoms

- Use over-the-counter or homemade salt-water (*saline*) nasal drops to help relieve stuffiness (*congestion*). Put 1 drop in each nostril as often as needed.
 - **Do not** use nasal drops that contain medicines unless your child's health care provider tells you to use them.
 - To make a solution for saline nasal drops, completely dissolve ¼ tsp of salt in 1 cup of warm water.
- If your child is 1 year or older, giving a teaspoon of honey before bed may improve symptoms and help relieve coughing at night. Make sure your child brushes his or her teeth after you give honey.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier to add moisture to the air. This can help your child breathe more easily.

Activity

- Have your child rest as much as possible.
- If your child has a fever, keep him or her home from daycare or school until the fever is gone.

General instructions

- Have your child drink enough fluids to keep his or her urine pale yellow.
- If needed, clean your young child's nose gently with a moist, soft cloth. Before cleaning, put a few drops of saline solution around the nose to wet the areas.
- Keep your child away from secondhand smoke.
- Make sure your child gets all recommended immunizations, including the yearly (*annual*) flu vaccine.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your child's health care provider. This is important.



How to prevent the spread of infection to others

- URIs can be passed from person to person (are *contagious*). To prevent the infection from spreading:
 - Have your child wash his or her hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, have your child use hand sanitizer. You and other caregivers should also wash your hands often.
 - Encourage your child to not touch his or her mouth, face, eyes, or nose.
 - Teach your child to cough or sneeze into a tissue or his or her sleeve or elbow instead of into a hand or into the air.



Contact a health care provider if:

- Your child has a fever, earache, or sore throat. Pulling on the ear may be a sign of an earache.
- Your child's eyes are red and have a yellow discharge.
- The skin under your child's nose becomes painful and crusted or scabbed over.



Get help right away if:

- Your child who is younger than 3 months has a temperature of 100°F (38°C) or higher.
- Your child has trouble breathing.
- Your child's skin or fingernails look gray or blue.
- Your child has signs of dehydration, such as:
 - Unusual sleepiness.
 - Dry mouth.
 - Being very thirsty.
 - Little or no urination.
 - Wrinkled skin.
 - Dizziness.
 - No tears.
 - A sunken soft spot on the top of the head.

Summary

- An upper respiratory infection (URI) is a common infection of the nose, throat, and upper air passages that lead to the lungs.
- A URI is caused by a virus.
- Give your child over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your child's health care provider. Medicines or antibiotics cannot cure URIs, but your child's health care provider may recommend over-the-counter cold medicines to help relieve symptoms, if your child is 6 years of age or older.
- Use over-the-counter or homemade salt-water (*saline*) nasal drops as needed to help relieve stuffiness (*congestion*).

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.