

## Acute Upper Respiratory Infection

### "Colds"

Colds are caused by various viruses including Rhinoviruses, RSV, and Para Influenza viruses. These viruses cause runny noses, watery eyes, cough, chest congestion, headaches, and body aches. The body's natural mechanism to rid itself of the virus is to make mucus which is what we blow out our nose and cough out of our chest. This is the natural way to shed the viruses. Cold medicine, decongestants and antihistamines, do not make colds go away, they just relieve symptoms for a short period of time. They work in various ways drying mucus, but short-circuit the body's mechanism to rid itself from the virus, prolonging the cold. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) doesn't recommend cold medicine in anyone under 6 years of age. Antibiotics, no matter what the color mucus is, have no effect on colds because they don't kill viruses.

Allergies can cause the same set of symptoms. In most children these symptoms, between October and April, likely indicate a cold. In fact, the AAP estimates the average child has 6-8 colds per season which last an average of 7-10 days. Therefore, it is likely runny noses in the winter are not allergies at all, but actually colds. As your child gets older his immune system remembers how to fight cold viruses. For this reason, colds become less frequent and last shorter periods of time.

So how do you treat a cold? The best way is to allow your child's body to get rid of the virus. Avoid cold medication unless your child simply can't function, then use them sparingly. Never use cold medication in children under six years of age. Sometimes helping nature along with saline nose drops and Mucinex (guanfacine), loosens the mucus and helps the body to rid itself of the virus. Long baths or showers also help clear mucus. The best studies show the only treatments that shorten the course of a cold are increasing liquids and rest. Again antibiotics do not help.

When do you need to be seen? Of course if you are uncomfortable with your child you need to be seen. More specifically fever and fast breathing are important indicators of a secondary infection or complication. Use your intuition; it's your best indicator.