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Colds and the Flu in Children

What is the common cold and the flu?

The common cold and the flu are viral infections of the respiratory tract, which includes the throat, nose, airways and lungs.

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How do I know if my child has a cold or the flu?

Although the common cold and the flu share many similar symptoms, they are two different conditions.

The symptoms of a cold include:

What is H1N1 flu?

The H1N1 influenza (also called swine influenza or swine flu) is a respiratory infection caused by a virus found in pigs. H1N1 flu can infect humans. For more information, visit our [H1N1 Influenza](#) handout.

- Fever up to 102°F
- Runny or stuffy nose (often with green or yellow-colored discharge)
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Sneezing
- Fatigue and muscle aches
- Headache

The symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever above 102°F
- Stuffy nose
- Diarrhea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Chills and sweats
- Fatigue and muscle aches
- Cough
- Headache
- Loss of appetite

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Drug Alert - Acetaminophen Concentrated Infant Drops

Drug makers will stop making acetaminophen concentrated infant drops. [Read more.](#)

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What medicines can I give my child?

There is no cure for the cold or the flu, and antibiotics do not work against the viruses that cause colds and the flu.

Pain relievers such as acetaminophen (one brand: Children's Tylenol) can help ease the pain of headaches, muscle aches and sore throats as well as treat fevers. Be sure you are giving your child the correct dose according to his or her age and weight.

Nasal sprays and decongestants are not recommended for young children, as they may cause side effects. Cough and cold medicines are not recommended for children, especially those younger than 2 years of age. There is also little evidence that cough and cold medicines and nasal decongestants are effective in treating children.

To treat a cold or the flu, make sure that your child rests and drinks plenty of fluids. You can use a humidifier to help moisten the air in your child's bedroom. This will help with nasal congestion. You can also use a saline nasal spray to thin nasal mucus, and a bulb syringe to suction mucus out of your baby or child's nose.

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Is there a way to prevent catching a cold or the flu?

The best way to prevent colds is to make sure you and your family members frequently wash your hands. This will kill the germs that can lead to the cold and the flu.

Encourage your child to cough and sneeze into the inside of his or her elbow (rather than into his or her hand). Clean common surfaces such as table and counter tops, your child's toys, door handles and bathroom facilities with anti-bacterial disinfectant. This can help stop the spread of germs.

To prevent the flu, a flu vaccine is available every fall (October or November). The flu shot is safe for all children 6 months of age and older, and it is strongly recommended that all children 6 months of age to 59 months of age get a yearly flu shot. A nasal spray that prevents the flu is also available. It is safe for all children 2 years of age and older who do not have asthma or breathing problems.

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Source

[Written by familydoctor.org editorial staff.](#)

[Appropriate Use of Antibiotics for URIs in Children: Part II. Cough, Pharyngitis and the Common Cold](#) by SF Dowell, M.D., M.P.H., B Schwartz, M.D., WR Phillips, M.D., M.P.H., and The Pediatric URI Consensus Team (*American Family Physician* October 15, 1998, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/981015ap/dowell.html>)

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