



National Prescribing Service Limited  
Australia's peak, independent, education and information provider about medicines

Fact Sheet

May 2005

## Tips to prevent and manage common colds in children

Common colds need common sense, they don't need antibiotics. Common colds are caused by a virus and usually get better on their own after 5-7 days. Colds in children are very common. Children can get 5-10 colds per year. This is more than adults as children do not have the same immunity to the illness.

### How can I help prevent my child's cold spreading to others?

Encourage children to:

- Cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Keep their hands away from their eyes, nose and mouth.
- Throw tissues in the bin after blowing their nose.
- Wash their hands with soap, particularly before eating food and after blowing their nose.
- Avoid sharing cups, glasses and cutlery.

### Three common sense steps to manage a child's common cold

#### 1. They need to take it easy

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest.

#### 2. Relieve their symptoms

- Encourage your child to drink as much as normal.
- Regularly blow your child's nose and throw tissues in the bin.
- Use a salve such as petroleum jelly on dry and chapped skin around your child's nose.

Always follow the instructions on medicines when giving them to children. If in doubt, talk to your pharmacist or GP, or call *Medicines Line* on 1300 888 763.

- Paracetamol or ibuprofen can help relieve aches and pains (such as sore throat) and reduce your child's fever. However **do not use ibuprofen in children under 6 months of age and do not give your child aspirin** unless prescribed by a doctor as it can cause serious harm.
- Nasal decongestants can help dry a runny nose and relieve blocked sinuses. They can be difficult to use in children and provide relief only for a short time.
- Young children should not breathe in steam from a bowl of hot water as they may burn themselves.

#### 3. See your doctor or pharmacist if it gets worse

It is important to see your doctor if you are concerned about your child's health or if symptoms are severe, last longer than usual or if your child has a severe headache or a stiff neck, their eyes hurt when exposed to light, they have difficulty waking up, a skin rash, a fever that lasts longer than three days, or vomiting. Make sure your child's immunisations are up to date. Babies under 6 months with a high temperature should be seen by a doctor.

Every winter National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS) runs the national health campaign *common colds need common sense*. This campaign encourages people to follow simple advice to correctly manage the common cold, without the use of antibiotics: take it easy, relieve the symptoms and see your doctor or pharmacist if the cold worsens. For more information visit [www.gottacold.com](http://www.gottacold.com)

NPS is an independent Australian organisation for Quality Use of Medicines, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

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