

Our Friend, the Common Cold

The common cold is the most common illness in children. It is caused by a host of viruses and typically lasts about two weeks. Common symptoms of a cold include: runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, fever, cough and fatigue. Most children with a cold will not need to see a doctor. However, there are situations when you should seek medical attention with your child. Some of these scenarios include the following: if your child has a high fever that does not go down with medication or has lasted for more than 3-4 days. Another worrisome symptom might be a severe cough that is causing your child to vomit or making it difficult to breathe. Colds come with a sore throat, but if it is making it difficult for your child to swallow, they should see their doctor. Another sign that your child may need evaluation include a cold that is not getting better after a week or two. As we always tell our patients and families, if you are worried about the way your child or teenager looks or have questions about their illness, it is best to call your doctor's office for advice or an appointment.

If your child requires a visit to the doctor, they will likely discuss various evidence based over-the-counter and home remedies that will help relieve your child's symptom. Some of these include honey for cough (children over one year of age), nasal saline lavage for runny and stuffy nose symptoms and lots of oral fluids and rest. Your doctor might also recommend a cool mist humidifier in your child's room. Children and teens are often not hungry when they are sick. This is ok and normal. Encourage fluids and sucking on frozen fruit or a popsicle is another good way to get some glucose and fluids. Over the counter pain/fever relievers like ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and acetaminophen (Tylenol) are safe and should only be used if necessary, as fever is a natural response to illness (however they may be used more often to treat headache, body aches and sore throat pain that can come with a bad cold).

Your physician will recommend you keep your child/teen home while they are acutely sick, especially if they have a fever $>$ or $= 100.4$.

Some example of common cold viruses, like rhinovirus and common cold coronaviruses (+COVID19), are with us year to year from September to March. In Florida, RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, has an earlier season onset and longer duration than most other regions of the country. 2022-2023 was an onerous year with RSV, which typically causes 2.1 million outpatient visits among children less than 5 years old, 58-80,000 hospitalizations among children under 5 years of age and an average of 100-300 deaths in children younger than 5. These viruses can cause the spectrum of cold symptoms, from mild illness, "the sniffles", to serious respiratory infections resulting in hospitalization. Seasonal patterns of cold viruses were consistent prior to 2020. Since that time, the patterns of circulating respiratory viruses has been disrupted, with some viruses rising in spring months and peaking in July (usually a low season).

Although we cannot predict when more common seasonal patterns will return, with healthy habits like a good diet, a regular sleep and exercise routine, good hand hygiene, masks when appropriate and adherence to good policies when you are sick (Stay home! Rest!), you can arm yourself for a (hopefully) healthier cold season. We recognize our friend, the common cold, as an annoying illness and usually not serious. With a little care and attention, your child/teen will be feeling better in no time. Remember to call your physician with questions. We are here to help.