

Treatment of Respiratory Illness

Respiratory illnesses are common during childhood. They can occur during any season, although certain illnesses are more prevalent during certain months of the year. Colds, croup and bronchiolitis are viral respiratory infections that are commonly acquired during infancy and childhood. Our goal in treating these illnesses is to make your child comfortable for the duration of the illness. Colds, croup and bronchiolitis are viral infections. There is no role for using antibiotics if your child has one of these infections. Most viral respiratory illnesses last between seven and fourteen days. Some children will cough for up to three weeks following a viral illness. Tylenol, Motrin or Advil are appropriate for fever. Please see the dosing chart for accurate dosing of these medications.

For most parents and children, the most distressing symptom of a respiratory illness is the cough. Many children will sleep poorly because of coughing. They may vomit from excess mucous production, or from the act of coughing itself. Controlling the cough is one way to make your child more comfortable until the illness runs its course.

Coughing from a common cold is caused by excessive mucous production, and gagging. For infants, the mucous can be thinned with instilling saline drops in the nose. You can make these drops at home by dissolving ½ teaspoon of table salt in 1 cup of water. Put 2-3 drops of the salt water in each nostril before feeding the baby. Allow the drops to stay in the nose for 2-3 minutes and then gently suction each nostril. Saline nose drops are also available over the counter in most drug stores and groceries. Warm steam can also loosen up mucous and allow your child to sleep more soundly. Take your infant or young child into the bathroom, and run the shower very hot for 10-15 minutes until the room is steamy. Put the child on your lap or over your shoulder. Using the palm of your hand, clap the child on the back for a few minutes to loosen up the mucous. Your child may cough up, or vomit, mucous. Clean out your child's mouth with a soft cloth, tissue or bulb syringe. You can repeat steam treatments at least four times a day to keep your child comfortable. Warm or cool mist vaporizers can be used in your child's room to moisturize the air while they sleep. If you are using a warm mist vaporizer, make sure it is far enough away from your child's crib or bed so that they cannot touch the vaporizer and get burned. If you have tried these things, and your child's sleep is still disrupted by coughing, please contact our office or the physician on call.

Croup is a viral infection of the vocal cords (larynx). The cough from croup tends to be brassy, and barking, like a seal. The child may be very hoarse as well. The symptoms of croup often start suddenly in the middle of the night, and can be frightening to parents and children. Staying calm can help your child to remain calm when they are ill. Cold air can be helpful to decrease the coughing with croup. If it is cool outside, simply take your child out into the night air for 15-20 minutes. If it is very warm out, open the freezer door and have your child breathe the cold air that way. Children with croup may also respond to the warm mist. The instructions are the same as above for the common cold.

Bronchiolitis is a very common viral respiratory infection that occurs in the late fall and winter months. It is caused by several different viruses, the most common of which is called RSV. The vast majority of

children with RSV bronchiolitis have very mild illnesses that need no special treatment. They recover within the same time as any other cold-like illness. Some children who get RSV will wheeze with their illness. In most cases, these are children less than one year of age. For these children, the most important goal is to make sure they remain well hydrated with regular feedings of breast milk or formula for the duration of the illness. Saline nose drops and steam treatments can help with the cold-like symptoms of bronchiolitis, but are not effective for wheezing. In mildly affected infants, the wheezing is best treated with observation and good hydration. Almost all children will recover uneventfully from bronchiolitis. There are children who are at higher risk for more severe bronchiolitis, including premature babies, children with congenital heart defects or asthma. If your child falls into one of those categories, we will want to follow your child more closely during their illness.

Most viral respiratory illnesses in children are mild and self-limited in nature. If your child seems to be struggling to breathe, even when their nose has been cleared out, if your child is unable to drink and breathe at the same time after their nose is cleared out, if your child's color appears excessively pale or bluish, or if your child simply is "not himself", please call the office or the doctor on call.