

Metro Parent



TOP 12

# Kids Illnesses & Treatments

From common cold and croup to hand, foot and mouth disease and head lice, find out what these childhood maladies are, how long they last – and how to treat them.



**S**niffles and sore throats are as common in childhood as crayons and Play-Doh. Getting sick is, well, part of being a kid. So what do you do when your kiddo gets ill? First, know that it's normal for kids not to feel well on occasion (yep, there's still no cure for the common cold). And while you can't prevent every illness, it's helpful to know what the most common ones are, along with how they're treated.

Click and flip on to get yourself medically informed.

Guide written by Kristen J. Gough

**Please note:** This informational piece should not be considered diagnostic or medical advice. If you have any health concerns about your child, contact his or her pediatrician with specific questions and treatment remedies.

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## 1.

## Acute Bronchitis

**WHAT IS IT?**

Also called a chest cold, bronchitis is an inflammation of the breathing tubes, or airways, called bronchi. It may also occur in children with chronic sinusitis, allergies or those with enlarged tonsils or adenoids. Besides a cough, kids with bronchitis may have a runny nose, mild fever, wheezing, a sore throat and some mucus discharge.

**HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?**

With acute bronchitis, often caused by a virus, symptoms usually clear up in a week.

**HOW IS IT TREATED?**

Acute bronchitis typically clears on its own but may require prescription medication to treat. Note: Acute bronchitis is different than *chronic* bronchitis, which has symptoms that can last 2-3 months or even years. That type requires more regular physician follow-up and medical care.

**MORE**

- > [KidsHealth](#)
- > [Good4Utah.com](#)
- > [Parenting and Child Health](#)
- > [Medscape](#)

## 2.

## Common Cold

**WHAT IS IT?**

It's called the common cold for a reason. There's just no way around it – your child will probably battle 8-10 colds before her second birthday. But this helps your child's developing immune system build up its defenses, and she'll have fewer colds as she gets older. As with adults, your child is more likely to get a cold when she's stuck indoors and/or around a lot of others. Symptoms include a running nose, nasal congestion, sneezing, coughing, a slight sore throat and sometimes a mild fever.

**HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?**

A cold can last anywhere from a few days to 2 weeks. If your child's symptoms are severe and/or last more than 10 days without getting better, make sure to contact your pediatrician.

**HOW IS IT TREATED?**

The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents not to use over-the-counter cough and cold remedies for youngsters under the age of 4. Also, antibiotics can't cure a cold. Instead, use either ibuprofen or acetaminophen to ease aches and pains.

**MORE**

- > [National Institutes of Health](#)
- > [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

## 3.

## Croup

**WHAT IS IT?**

A barking cough. That's the tell-tale sign of croup. Most often caused by a viral infection, croup affects and inflames your child's airways, making it difficult to breathe, especially at night. Your child may also have a fever and generally be irritable. Because of their small, less-developed airways, younger children, or those under 3, are more prone to developing croup than older kids.

**HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?**

3 to 5 days.

**HOW IS IT TREATED?**

For most children, the symptoms resolve themselves without medical intervention. But in some instances, children require medical treatment – and, for some, hospitalization – to restore normal breathing.

**MORE**

- > [WebMD](#)
- > [Mayo Clinic](#)
- > [KidsHealth](#)

**COUGH OR COLD?  
SKIP THE OTC**

The U.S Food & Drug Administration warns parents not to give over-the-counter cough and cold medicines to children who are under the age of 4, **WebMD notes**. The medicines – which include decongestants, expectorants, antihistamines and cough suppressants – can have side effects. They've also not proven effective enough to warrant the potential risks.

## 4.

## Diarrhea

## WHAT IS IT?

Loose stool – i.e. runny poop. Unfortunately, most kids will have diarrhea at one time or another. The good news is that diarrhea is a natural defense mechanism your child's body uses to get rid of germs. Diarrhea doesn't always have a clear-cut cause: It may be your child ate something that doesn't sit well with him. Perhaps he has an undiagnosed food allergy or intolerance. Then again, he may have a viral infection working its way through his system. Rotavirus is a common trigger for diarrhea in kids, especially those in child care and school (there is now a vaccine for rotavirus). But bacteria and parasites can cause diarrhea, too.

## HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

Generally a few days. In more serious cases it can last longer and require medical intervention.

## HOW IS IT TREATED?

For mild diarrhea, extra fluids should do the trick, along with having time to rest and recover. If the diarrhea persists or worsens, your child may need testing to determine the exact cause and medication to ease symptoms. One critical concern with diarrhea is dehydration, so make sure to give your child plenty to drink to replenish the fluids he's losing while he's sick.

## MORE

- > [KidsHealth](#)
- > [WebMD](#)

## 5.

## Ear Infections

## WHAT IS IT?

Does your toddler keep tugging at her ear? Perhaps she's also fussier than normal? In younger kids, the middle part of the ear is still developing and is particularly vulnerable to fluid buildup and the infections that can come with it. The throbbing inflammation can leave your child miserable. While ear infections are seen more frequently in young children, older children – and even teens – aren't completely immune.

## HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

For some children, the infection can resolve itself in a few days. But you should contact your child's pediatrician right away if you suspect an ear infection. Some children are particularly prone to ear infections and can have multiple bouts.

## HOW IS IT TREATED?

Again, call your child's doctor for specific treatment recommendations. It may be that your child simply needs a warm compress on her ear, some over-the-counter pain medication and a little TLC. In some instances, children may need antibiotics to combat the infection. And in kids who have multiple episodes, the doctor may recommend additional medical intervention like putting in ear tubes.

## MORE

- > [National Institutes of Health](#)
- > [WebMD](#)
- > [Mayo Clinic](#)

GETTING KIDS  
TO WASH THEIR  
HANDS

Proper hand washing helps kids stay healthy.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

calls it a “do-it-yourself” vaccine. Still, it can still be challenging to get kids with the program. Try these tips from both the CDC and [WebMD](#):

- Have her sing the “alphabet song” while she washes to encourage her to take her time.
- Let your child pick out a special soap she uses each time. Maybe the dispenser has one of her favorite cartoon characters on it. (Note: Antibacterial soap isn't necessary.)
- Ask her to smell her hands once she's done. She can tell when her hands are clean enough, if they smell good – and you can help her tell the difference.

## 6.

## Flu (Influenza)

## WHAT IS IT?

You can thank (or curse) a highly contagious virus for causing the flu. The infection spreads through the respiratory tracts and can easily be confused with a cold. Your child might complain of muscle aches, headaches, sore throat, chills, fever, nausea and/or vomiting, diarrhea and more. While the flu can happen any time of year, it's most common between late December to early March.

## HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

The flu can come on fast, wiping out your child's energy. Usually, the worst of the symptoms have gone away after about 5 days, although some may persist for up to 2 weeks.

## HOW IS IT TREATED?

Avoid it. The flu vaccine can help prevent or lessen the symptoms. Lots of rest and plenty of fluids along with a pain reliever like acetaminophen or ibuprofen can help lessen aches and pains. As a viral infection, antibiotics aren't effective against the flu, although your child's doctor may need to prescribe antiviral medications to prevent flu complications.

## MORE

- > [KidsHealth](#)
- > [WebMD](#)

## 7.

## Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

### WHAT IS IT?

Perhaps the first sign of this viral illness you'll see in your child are painful sores in his mouth that look like flat, red spots. You might also see a rash of red spots that can even blister on the palm of his hands, the soles of his feet and less frequently in other places like the elbows, knees and bottom. He may also have a fever, sore throat and just have a general feeling of sickness. HFMD is contagious and seen most often in children ages 5 and under.

### HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

For most, around 7 to 10 days, notes the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### HOW IS IT TREATED?

Usually the symptoms, which tend to be mild, go away on their own. In rare cases, medical intervention may be required.

### MORE

- > [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- > [KidsHealth](#)
- > [Today's Parent](#)
- > [WebMD](#)

## 8.

## Head Lice

### WHAT IS IT?

These tiny, six-legged parasites like to stow away on a person's head, feeding on small amounts of blood from the scalp. Yeah, not a pretty picture. The good news is that these critters, which are about the size of a sesame seed, are relatively harmless – the real pain comes in trying to get rid of them! Head lice are highly contagious, so if your child does get an infestation, take steps immediately to get rid of them. In general, urge your children not to share hats, scarves, brushes, pillow, blankets or other items with another child since lice are easily transferred from one head to another.

### HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

Characterized by an itchy scalp and visible lice moving in the hair, lice infestations can last several days and may require multiple rounds of treatment to remove them completely.

### HOW IS IT TREATED?

Although there are some prescription medications, for most cases, over-the-counter treatments are sufficient. Follow the directions on the medication carefully to rid the hair of lice. You'll also need to wash the clothes and bedding of the child who was infected.

### MORE

- > [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- > [KidsHealth](#)
- > [WebMD](#)

## 9.

## Meningitis

### WHAT IS IT?

Meningitis is an inflammatory disease of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. It's caused by a viral or bacterial infection from another part of the body either directly (from a nearby sinus infection, for example) or indirectly (via the bloodstream). It is most common in infants and children.

Viral meningitis is generally mild. It usually clears up within 2 weeks. Bacterial meningitis, very rare in the United States, must be treated immediately with antibiotics to prevent brain damage, hearing loss, mental damage – even death. Kids with bacterial often have a fever, severe pain in their head and neck, vomiting, seizures and a sense of being confused.

### HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

Viral meningitis usually clears up within 7 to 10 days and can usually be treated at home. Bacterial meningitis can be deadly if not treated promptly, so you should contact your child's pediatrician right away.

### HOW IS IT TREATED?

For viral, antibiotics aren't effective. Often, pediatricians suggest kids get plenty of rest and fluids. If bacterial is at play, your child will likely need to be hospitalized and receive antibiotics intravenously. To determine the type, your child will need to have a spinal tap.

### MORE

- > [WebMD](#)
- > [KidsHealth](#)
- > [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)



### WHEN IN DOUBT, CALL THE DOC

If you have any concerns about your child's behavior, whether she's sniffing a little more than normal or he's complaining more than usual of tummy pains, pick up the phone. It's best to check in with your child's pediatrician. Sometimes, for example, the pediatrician may be aware of outbreaks in your area that you don't know about, like pink eye or meningitis.

## 10.

## Pink Eye

## WHAT IS IT?

As the name implies, pink eye – also known as conjunctivitis – is an inflammation of the eye that causes it to appear pink. The highly contagious illness, which can be caused by viruses, bacteria, allergens or other irritants, tends to make the eye feel itchy, too.

## HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

Generally it goes away on its own within 7 to 10 days, without requiring medication.

## HOW IS IT TREATED?

In most instances, medication isn't needed. However, if your child is experiencing pain, or if he's noticing changes in his vision or doesn't seem to be improving, contact his pediatrician.

## MORE

- > [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- > [Mayo Clinic](#)

BEST WAY TO  
TREAT AN ILLNESS?  
AVOID IT!

When it comes to keeping the germs away, try these three tips from

WebMD.

- Encourage your child to wash his hands regularly and thoroughly.
- Skip situations, if possible, where your kids might be around people with sore throats, colds or other contagious illnesses.
- Keep kids away from cigarette smoke.

## 11.

RSV  
(Respiratory  
Syncytial Virus)

## WHAT IS IT?

RSV can seem like a common cold – in fact, the contagious virus can *cause* colds and other illnesses like bronchiolitis, an inflammation of your child's airways, or pneumonia. And, like a cold, it's also more prone to happen in the fall and winter months versus warmer times of year when kids (and adults) are stuck inside. Symptoms tend to include difficulty breathing, runny nose, mild fever, coughing, wheezing and irritability. And in older kids, the symptoms tend to be mild and similar to those of a cold.

## HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

As with a cold, RSV tends to last a few days and kids usually recover within 1–2 weeks.

## HOW IS IT TREATED?

In healthy children, it often runs its course without requiring medical intervention. But with younger infants, especially those born prematurely, the disease can be a serious cause for concern and may even lead to their being admitted to the hospital for treatment and care.

## MORE

- > [MedlinePlus](#)
- > [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- > [American Lung Association](#)
- > [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

## 12.

## Strep Throat

## WHAT IS IT?

If your child is complaining that his throat hurts and it's difficult for him to swallow, he just may have strep throat. But with strep throat, which is caused by a bacteria infection, your child's symptoms will go beyond soreness in a few days to include swollen glands in his neck (lymph nodes), a fever, a headache, loss of appetite and enlarged tonsils.

Still, it can be difficult to tell the difference between strep throat and a regular sore throat. Although the CDC is quick to point out that strep throat is more common in youngsters when compared to adults: "In children, 20 to 30 out of every 100 sore throats are strep throat. In adults, only 5 to 15 out of every 100 sore throats is." In other words, a sore throat is more likely to be strep in youngsters.

## HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

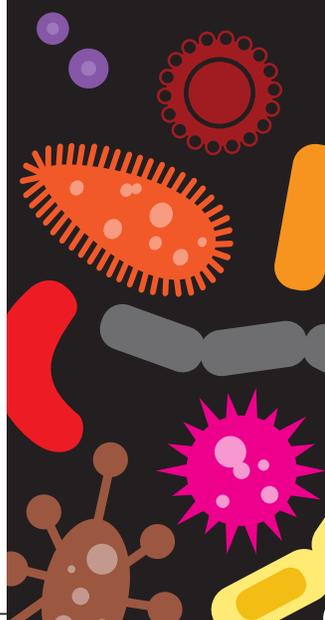
If a sore throat lasts longer than a week, or if your child's symptoms are severe, contact your pediatrician right away. The pediatrician can do a simple test to determine whether your child has strep.

## HOW IS IT TREATED?

Over-the-counter treatments may offer some relief, but if your child's symptoms aren't improving, antibiotics may be needed to combat the bacteria.

## MORE

- > [KidsHealth](#)
- > [Mayo Clinic](#)





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# stays healthy

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[MetroParent.com/Health](http://MetroParent.com/Health).