

# Treating Common Cold in a 3-Year-Old: All You Need To Know



What do you do when your child catches a cold? From causes and treatment to prevention tips, this article focuses on how you can relieve your child of her runny nose and itchy throat.

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# Symptoms of common cold

Common cold is an acute viral infection of the upper respiratory tract in which symptoms of running nose and nose block are predominant.

The typical symptoms your child will feel are sore throat followed by running nose and nose block. Two-thirds of the patients may develop dry irritating cough once the nasal symptoms appear. Often, this is due to irritation caused by post nasal drip. These children may have bouts of cough immediately after sleeping. The cough can even go on for a week or two after the other symptoms of cold are gone.

A few children may complain of headache, hoarseness of voice, body ache, irritability, difficulty in sleeping and reduced appetite when they have cold. Fever is uncommon in a 3-year-old with common cold.

Occasionally cold leads to complications like ear infections, sinusitis and exacerbation of asthma.

Common cold symptoms generally last for a week but if they persist or don't follow the usual path, it's imperative to visit your doctor to rule out other diseases which present in a similar manner, like bacterial infections, allergic rhinitis, foreign body, rhinitis medicamentosa, etc.



## What causes common cold?

More than 200 types of human rhinoviruses are responsible for over 50% of colds. Other viruses implicated are RSV, human metapneumovirus, parainfluenza, adenovirus, etc.

These viruses typically spread by hand-to-hand or hand-to-surface-to-hand transmission – direct contact of hands with viruses followed by self-inoculation on touching our face with infected hands. They also spread by inhaling viruses when a person with cold sneezes or coughs in our vicinity. Children going to playgroups or daycare centres are more vulnerable.



# How to treat common cold in your child

There is no magical cure! However, the following measures will make your child comfortable.

**REST:** There is an immune battle going on in your child which taxes the body. She needs to rest for more than 12 hours a day.

**ADEQUATE ORAL HYDRATION:** This helps to thin the secretions, soothes respiratory mucosa and prevents dehydration. Give plenty of warm liquids – soup, water, milk, kanji, clear broth, etc. A child with reduced appetite may not want to eat much but will be ready to accept liquids. *Luke warm water is also a good cough suppressant.*

**SALINE NASAL DROPS AND SPRAY:** They help to remove secretions and reduce discomfort. Don't use medicated drops. They may cause rebound congestion if used for more than 5 days.

**HUMIDIFIED AIR:** It helps to make nasal secretions loose. You may use cool humidifiers or expose your child to bathroom steam if she is comfortable with that.

**BLOWING THE NOSE THE RIGHT WAY:** Teach your child never to sniff the secretions back into the nose. Close one nostril with your finger and teach her to gently blow out the secretions from the other nostril.

**HONEY AND LEMON MIXTURE:** It will help soothe the throat. Give your child one spoonful 2-3 times a day to reduce irritant cough.



**EUCALYPTUS OR MENTHOL OIL:** A drop or two on their pillow or shirt may improve perception of nasal patency, although it's not shown to affect spirometry.



**GOOD NUTRITION:** It is very important to give your child a nutritious diet when she is sick as well as when she's recovering from cold. A diet rich in vitamins and zinc will help. Give plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Let the child eat anything that he likes, he's more likely to accept favourite foods during illness when his appetite is reduced. Don't force feed your child.

**PARACETAMOL:** A child having fever, sore throat or body ache may be made comfortable by giving her Paracetamol. Avoid using Aspirin, Ibuprofen or Nimesulide.

**COUGH:** Some children may get virus induced reactive airway disease. They may need bronchodilators.

**COUGH AND COLD SYRUPS:** Over-the-counter cough and cold remedies are not advised for a 3-year-old child. Some medicines have grave side effects while others are useless. First generation antihistamines may reduce running nose symptoms but cause sedation or paradoxical hyperactivity. Use medicines only on a need basis after consulting your doctor.

**AVOID ANTIBIOTICS:** They don't act on viruses and cause unnecessary side effects and antibiotic resistance.



# How to prevent your child from catching common cold?

- Frequent hand washing
- Avoid touching one's mouth, nose and face unnecessarily
- Use hand sanitizers
- Avoid close contact with persons having cold
- Avoid daycare centres and playgroups when unwell – so that your child doesn't infect other children
- Check that your child does not have Vitamin D deficiency and anemia
- Lack of sleep and stress reduce immunity. Ensure your child gets adequate rest.
- The influenza vaccine would cover a small portion of all colds.

Common cold is the most frequent infectious disease in humans. A child may get 5 to 8 episodes of cold per year till the age of 5 years. The disease gives your child a lot of discomfort and affects the quality of his life. So it is important to handle it correctly – with a lot of supportive care and love.



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