

Primary Care Provider Tips on Caring for Children with Respiratory Symptoms

Most respiratory illness in children, including colds, influenza, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) and COVID-19 can be managed at home without the need for prescription medications. However, in some cases, it is important to seek medical care. Below, primary care providers share tips on how to decide when to seek care for a respiratory illness and how to support your child at home.

CALL YOUR PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER IF YOUR CHILD:

- Has a fever above 38 degrees Celsius lasting 72 hours or longer.
- Is unusually irritable and won't stop fussing, even after treating their fever.
- Has an earache lasting more than 48 hours.
- Has dry mouth and has not urinated in eight hours.
- Has special needs that make caring for them more complex.
- As a parent or guardian, you know your child best. If you feel your child needs to be seen by a primary care provider, (physician or nurse practitioner), please reach out for help. **If they are experiencing breathing issues, go to the emergency department or call Health Connect Ontario.**

HELPING YOUR CHILD AT HOME

Fever: Treat fever or pain with over-the-counter medicines such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen if your child can take it—and if it is available. Aspirin or products containing acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) are not recommended for children. *Call your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or pharmacist for advice if you are having difficulty accessing over the counter medicines.*

Red eyes and discharge: These symptoms almost always go away on their own, without antibiotic drops or other medication. Warm compresses and artificial tears can help reduce discomfort.

Stuffy and runny nose: Try saline rinsing sprays, a humidifier or a nasal aspirator.

Earache: If you notice your child tugging on their ear, they may have an earache. Get assessed if your child's earache lasts more than 48 hours, or if there is discharge from the ear, or if they have had 2-3 ear infections in the last year.

Cough: Treat a cough with a humidifier or the steam from a shower. If the cough sounds like a bark, cool outside air might help. If your child is one year or older, you can give them 1-2 teaspoons of honey in the evening.

Fluids: Make sure your child gets enough fluids, including water, soups, sports drinks or even popsicles. Breastmilk/formula is enough for young babies who do not drink other fluids.

CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT WHEN:

- You are worried that your child is seriously ill.
- Your infant, younger than 3 months old, has a fever.
- Your child is struggling to breathe or is breathing faster than normal (wheezing, whistling, breathing more than once per second, turning white/blue.)
- You are concerned that your child is at risk of dehydration or is dehydrated.
- Your child has dry mouth and is not urinating at least every eight hours.



TIPS TO STAY HEALTHY & PREVENT ILLNESS

- **Wear a mask (and have your child wear a mask where possible) when in crowded, public indoor spaces. Children ages two to five should only wear a mask with supervision if they can safely tolerate masking and can put it on and take it off.**
- **Wash your hands often and well; use hand sanitizer when washing is not possible.**
- **Cough and sneeze into your elbow instead of your hands.**
- **Stay home and keep your child home when they are sick, especially in the first couple of days when most infectious.**
- **Get the flu shot and keep COVID-19 doses up to date.**