

Jan. 2015

Communicable Disease Division
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Dear Parent or Guardian:

Despite your best efforts, your child is likely to get a **cold**. A cold is a mild infection of the upper respiratory system caused by a virus. There are many different types of viruses, which may cause a cold. Many young children will have between 5–6 colds per year.

What are the symptoms of a cold?

Symptoms may include runny and stuffy nose, coughing and sneezing, sore throat, mild fever, swollen glands, and stuffy or congested ears. A cold may last up to two weeks. Green mucous is common in the healing stages of a cold and does not indicate a need for antibiotics. Symptoms of cold and flu (influenza) are very similar; however the flu is generally worse than a cold and symptoms such as fever, body aches, dry cough, and tiredness are more extreme.

How are colds spread?

Colds are easily spread from person-to-person through the air by coughing or sneezing. Surfaces and hands contaminated with nose, mouth, or throat secretions may also spread cold viruses.

How is a cold treated?

There is no cure for the common cold. Colds rarely require medical treatment and antibiotics are not effective against colds. Measures may be taken to help relieve the symptoms, which may include getting enough rest and drinking plenty of fluids.

How do you control the spread?

Make sure adults and children wash hands frequently and thoroughly. Antibacterial soap is not necessary; use plenty of plain liquid soap and warm water. Teach children to cover their noses and mouths with a tissue or their arm when coughing or sneezing. When using a tissue, wash hands well afterwards. Avoid touching the eyes, mouth, or nose. Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces frequently. Exclusion of children with colds from school and childcare is generally not necessary. However, if the child is too sick to participate in normal activities, they should be kept at home.

How do I get more information?

For more information about the common cold, contact your healthcare provider or Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department at (253) 798-6410 and press “0”.

*Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 2005.
This letter is reviewed annually. Go to www.tpchd.org to receive the most up-to-date version.*