

Where **kids** come first

The common cold and the flu



Hôpital de Montréal
pour enfants

Centre universitaire
de santé McGill



Montreal Children's
Hospital

McGill University
Health Centre

Parents often worry when their child seems to get one cold after another, after another. But a normal, healthy child usually gets between four to eight viral infections a year. What's more, children who attend daycare, especially those age two or younger, are likely to get even more infections.

Generally, children start coming down with a cold or flu during the fall when they return to school or daycare. The cold and flu "season" lasts until the end of winter. The flu virus is more serious than a cold. December to the end of March is prime flu epidemic time.

Most cold and flu viruses are passed from one child to another through coughing, sneezing and hand contact. The viruses are often found on children's hands so it is very important to encourage children to wash their hands often.



Read more about how to wash your hands properly on The Montreal Children's Hospital website:
thechildren.com/en/health/conditions.aspx
(key word: hand washing).



Your child should stay home from school and only go back to school once the fever has been gone for at least 24 hours.

Rest and fluids: the best remedy to fight a cold

A simple cold with a cough, runny nose and slight fever is not serious. Usually a day or two of rest and plenty of fluids are all that's needed to recover.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Decongestants and other over-the-counter cold remedies are not recommended for children younger than two years of age. You should talk to your child's doctor about over-the-counter medication to make sure that they are safe to use and that you give your child the correct dose.

Researchers have shown that a tablespoon of dark honey is just as good as dextromethorphan (a common ingredient in cold medications) for calming a cough.

If your child has a fever of 38.8 degrees or more, as measured with a rectal thermometer, you might want to give them acetaminophen or ibuprofen to help bring the fever down and make them feel more comfortable. Your child should stay home from school and only go back to school once the fever has been gone for at least 24 hours. A child who is more seriously ill may need to stay home for two or three days.

If your child's fever remains very high or lasts more than 48 hours, or your child appears unusually sick, you should take them to your pediatrician, or if absolutely necessary, go to an emergency room.

Vitamin C: good for you but it won't prevent colds and flu

Despite what you may have read or heard, no study to date has shown that massive doses of Vitamin C will prevent colds or the flu. Good nutrition is still important though, and a well-balanced diet should include citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit, etc.), and other sources of Vitamin C.



The flu: more serious than a cold

Flu (influenza) is usually more severe than a cold; children will likely have fever, congestion, cough and often will vomit and have diarrhea. The fever may last for several days. Treatment for the flu is similar to the treatment outlined above for a cold.

Immunization, or a flu shot as it's commonly known, can help prevent and/or lessen the impact of the disease. Flu vaccines are generally given in October prior to flu season. Ask your pediatrician or local CLSC when the vaccine will be available.

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This information was prepared by the Pediatric Consultation Centre of The Montreal Children's Hospital of the McGill University Health Centre.

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