

Runny Nose

(Green or yellow mucus)

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Your child has a runny nose. This is a normal part of what happens as the common cold gets better. Here are some facts about colds and runny noses.

What causes a runny nose during a cold?

When germs that cause colds (cold viruses) first infect the nose and sinuses, the nose produces clear mucus. This helps wash germs from the nose and sinuses. After two or three days, the body's immune cells fight back changing the mucus to a white or yellow color. As the bacteria that live in the nose grow back, they may also be found in the mucus, changing the mucus to a greenish color. This is normal, and does not mean your child is infected with bacteria that need antibiotic treatment.

How is a runny nose treated?

The best treatment is watchful waiting. Nasal discharge, cough, and symptoms like fever, headache, and muscle aches may be bothersome, but antibiotics will not make them go away sooner. Some people find that using a cool mist vaporizer or taking a decongestant makes them feel better.

Are antibiotics ever needed for a runny nose?

Only if your doctor has diagnosed sinusitis.

Why not take antibiotics now?

Unnecessary antibiotics can be harmful. After each course of antibiotics, children are more likely to carry resistant germs in their noses. If children are infected, it is more likely to be with these resistant germs. Resistant germs are not killed by the usual antibiotics. Your child may need more expensive antibiotics, antibiotics by needle, or even antibiotics in hospital. Since a runny nose generally gets better on its own, it is better to wait and take antibiotics only when needed.

What should I do?

Be glad that your child has a mild condition that will probably get better by itself. Your doctor may prescribe medications that will help with the symptoms, but right now, antibiotics are not needed.