



# Respiratory infections

Many different germs may cause colds and respiratory illnesses with fever. These illnesses are very common during fall and winter months. Infants and young children who experience common respiratory infections and are also exposed to second-hand tobacco smoke are at increased risk of developing bronchiolitis, bronchitis, pneumonia, and middle ear infections.

## School health and childcare provider information

### Cause

Many different viruses (e.g., parainfluenza, various adenoviruses) and bacteria (e.g., *Mycoplasma pneumonia*).

### Symptoms

May include runny nose, sneezing, chills, tiredness, fever, muscle aches, sore throat, and cough which may last 2 to 7 days. Bronchitis, specifically, is characterized by a dry, harsh, increasingly productive cough and green or yellow sputum production (in older children) that can last 1 to 2 weeks.

### Spread

Respiratory viruses and bacteria are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes tiny droplets into the air, and another person breathes them in. It can also be spread by touching the secretions from the nose and mouth of an infected person or by touching hands, tissues, or other items soiled with these secretions and then touching one's eyes, nose, or mouth.

### Incubation

It may take up to 10 days after exposure for symptoms to start depending on the germ that is causing the infection.

### Contagious period

Shortly before symptoms begin through the duration of acute symptoms. This may last from 5 to 8 days.

### Exclusion

*Childcare and school*

Until fever is gone without the aid of fever reducing medication and the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

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## Diagnosis

Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has a high fever, difficulty swallowing or breathing, or persistent sore throat or cough.

## Treatment

Most respiratory infections are viral illnesses; therefore, antibiotics will not be effective.

**Do not give aspirin or salicylate-containing medications to any child or adolescent under 18 years of age.**

## Prevention

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues in the trash.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth or handling used tissues. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces (doorknobs, refrigerator handles, crib rails, water faucets, cupboard handles) at least daily (see Section 2).
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Do not allow sharing of anything that goes into the mouth such as drinking cups, straws, water bottles, and eating utensils.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

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