

# Cough - Symptom (Age 1-5)

## Definition

- A cough is the sound made when the cough reflex clears the lungs. It helps protect the lungs from infections.
- A coughing fit or spell is over 5 minutes of nonstop coughing.
- Coughs can be dry (no mucus) or wet (with mucus).

## Health Information

### Causes

- **Viral bronchitis.** Most coughs are part of a cold that includes the lower airway. The bronchi are the lower part of the airway that go to the lungs. Bronchitis in children is always caused by a virus.
- Many viruses can cause a cough. This includes cold viruses, influenza, croup and bronchiolitis (RSV) viruses.
- Bacteria do not cause bronchitis in healthy children.
- Chronic bronchitis in adults is caused by smoking.
- **More serious causes:** whooping cough, pneumonia and airway foreign body.
- **Asthma.** Asthma is the most common cause of chronic coughs in children. In adults it's smoking.
- **Allergic cough.** Some children get a cough from breathing in an allergic substance. Examples are pollens or cats. Allergic coughs can be controlled with allergy medicines.

### Phlegm or Sputum

- Mucus or phlegm can be white, grey, yellow or green.
- Yellow or green phlegm is a normal part of the healing of viral bronchitis.
- This means the lining of the windpipe was damaged by the virus. It's part of the phlegm your child coughs up.
- Antibiotics are not helpful for the yellow or green phlegm seen with colds.

### Trouble Breathing: How to Tell

- Trouble breathing is a reason to see a doctor right away. Respiratory distress is the medical name for trouble breathing.
- Here are symptoms to worry about:
- Struggling for each breath or shortness of breath.
- Tight breathing so that your child can barely speak or cry.
- Ribs are pulling in with each breath (called retractions).
- Breathing has become noisy (such as wheezes).

### Prevention of Spread to Others

- Cover the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often. After coughing or sneezing are important times.
- Stay home from child care or school for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone. (CDC)

## Care Advice

## 1. **Key Points**

- Most coughs are a normal part of a cold. Viral bronchitis is the most common cause of a new cough in children.
- Most coughing is helpful. Coughing up mucus is very important. It helps protect the lungs from pneumonia.
- We don't want to turn off your child's ability to cough.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

## 2. **Home Treatment for Hard Coughing**

- GOAL: Decrease the irritation or tickle in the throat that causes a dry cough.
- AGE LESS THAN 1 YEAR: Keep your baby well hydrated with breast milk or formula.
- AGE 1 YEAR and OLDER: For hard coughing, use HONEY 1/2 to 1 teaspoon (2 to 5 mL) as needed. It can soothe the throat and loosen the cough.

## 3. **Over the Counter (OTC) Cough Medicine: Don't Use**

- OTC cough medicines are not approved by the FDA under 6 years of age. Reasons: not safe and can cause side effects. Also, they are not helpful.
- Honey has been shown to work better for coughs. (Caution: Do not use honey until 1 year old).
- OTC cough syrups containing honey are also available. They are not more effective than plain honey and cost much more.

## 4. **Coughing Fits or Spells - Warm Mist and Fluids**

- ANY AGE: Breathe warm mist (such as with shower running in a closed bathroom).
- AGE 1 YEAR and OLDER : Also drink some warm clear fluids, such as apple juice or herbal tea.
- Reason: Warm moisture can relax the airway and loosen up phlegm.
- What to Expect: The coughing fit should stop. But, your child will still have a normal cough.

## 5. **Vomiting**

- For vomiting that occurs with hard coughing, give smaller amounts per feeding.
- Reason: Vomiting from coughing is more common with a full stomach.

## 6. **Fluids**

- Try to get your child to drink lots of fluids.
- Goal: Keep your child well hydrated.
- It loosens up any phlegm in the lungs. Then it's easier to cough up.

## 7. **Humidifier**

- If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier. Reason: Dry air makes coughs worse.

## 8. **Fever**

- For fevers above 102° F (39° C), give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Note: Lower fevers are important for fighting infections.
- For ALL fevers: Keep your child well hydrated. Give lots of cold fluids.

## 9. **Antibiotics Not Needed**

- Antibiotics are not helpful for viral infections.
- They can only kill bacteria.

## 10. **Avoid Tobacco Smoke**

- Tobacco smoke makes coughs much worse.

## 11. **What to Expect**

- Viral coughs usually last 2 to 3 weeks.
- Sometimes, your child will cough up lots of phlegm (mucus). The mucus can normally be gray, yellow or green.

## 12. Return to School

- Your child can go back to school after the fever is gone.
- Your child should also feel well enough to join in normal activities.

## Call Your Doctor If

- Trouble breathing occurs
- Wheezing occurs
- Cough lasts more than 3 weeks
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

### Pediatric Care Advice

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