

# Cough - Symptom (Baby)

## 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 older children. In adults it's smoking.
- Allergic cough. Some children get a cough from breathing in an allergic substance. Examples are pollens or cat allergens. 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 cry.
- Ribs are pulling in with each breath (called retractions).
- Breathing has become noisy (such as wheezes).

## 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.
  - There is no safe or helpful cough medicine for babies.
  - Here is some care advice that should help.
2. **Coughing - Warm Mist**
  - Breathe warm mist (such as with shower running in a closed bathroom).
  - Reason: Warm moisture can relax the airway and loosen up phlegm.
  - What to Expect: The hard coughing should stop. But, your child will still have their normal cough that protects their airway.
3. **Vomiting**
  - For vomiting that occurs with hard coughing, give smaller amounts per feeding.
  - Reason: Vomiting from coughing is more common with a full stomach.
4. **Fluids**
  - Offer more formula or breastfeeds than usual.
  - Goal: Keep your child well hydrated.
  - It loosens up any phlegm in the lungs. Then it's easier to cough up.
5. **Humidifier**
  - If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier. Reason: Dry air makes coughs worse.
6. **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. (Caution: Do not use honey until 1 year old).
7. **Fever**
  - For fevers above 102° F (39° C), give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Note: Lower fevers are important for fighting infections.
  - Exception: before 3 months, call your child's doctor and don't give any fever meds.
  - For ALL fevers: Keep your child well hydrated. Give extra breastmilk or formula.
8. **Antibiotics Not Needed**
  - Antibiotics are not helpful for viral infections.
  - They can only kill bacteria.
9. **Avoid Tobacco Smoke**
  - Tobacco smoke makes coughs much worse.
10. **What to Expect**
  - Viral coughs usually last 2 to 3 weeks.
11. **Return to Child Care**
  - Your child can go back after the fever is gone for 24 hours.

## 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**

**Author:** Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

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