

Upper Respiratory Infection (Common Cold)

What is an upper respiratory infection?

The term upper respiratory infection usually refers to a viral infection of the upper respiratory tract (ie, nose, throat, ears, and eyes). Upper respiratory infections are common among infants in child care (7–9 per year), but become less common as children mature. Adults have an average of 4 upper respiratory infections per year.

What are the signs or symptoms?

- Cough
- Sore or scratchy throat or tonsillitis
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Watery eyes
- Headache
- Fever
- Earache

What are the incubation and contagious periods?

- Incubation period: 2 to 14 days.
- Contagious period: Usually a few days before signs or symptoms appear and while clear runny secretions are present. The presence of green or yellow discharge from the nose is common as the body discards mucus and other debris from the cold. Darker or greener nasal discharge does not mean the child is more ill, contagious, or has a greater need for antibiotics.

How is it spread?

- Direct or close contact with mouth and nose secretions
- Touching contaminated objects

How do you control it?

- Use good hand-washing technique at all the times listed in “When to Wash Hands” on page 25.
- Teach children and caregivers/teachers to cover their noses and mouths when sneezing or coughing with a disposable facial tissue if possible, or with a shoulder if no facial tissue is available in time (“give your cough or sneeze a cold shoulder”). Teach everyone to remove any soil and wash their hands right after using facial tissues or having contact with mucus to prevent the spread of disease by contaminated hands.
- Dispose of facial tissues that contain nasal secretions after each use.

- Sanitize surfaces that are touched by hands frequently, such as toys, tables, and doorknobs (see “Cleaning and Sanitizing Chart” on page 21).
- Ventilate the facility with fresh outdoor air and maintain temperature and humidity conditions as described in *Caring for Our Children*, Standard 5.028.
 - ~ Winter months: 65°F (18.3°C) to 75°F (23.9°C) with 30% to 50% relative humidity
 - ~ Summer months: 68°F (20°C) to 82°F (27.8°C) with 30% to 50% relative humidity
 - ~ Air exchange: Minimum of 15 cubic feet per minute per person of outdoor air

What are the roles of the caregiver/teacher and the family?

Exclusion of children with signs or symptoms has no benefit in reducing the spread of common respiratory infections. Viruses that cause upper respiratory infections are spread primarily by children who do not have signs or symptoms (ie, before they get sick, after they recover, some who never develop symptoms).

Exclude from group setting?

No, unless

- The child is unable to participate and staff determine that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.
- The child meets other exclusion criteria, such as fever with behavior change (see “Conditions Requiring Temporary Exclusion” on page 41).

Readmit to group setting?

When exclusion criteria are resolved, the child is able to participate, and staff determine that they can care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group

Comment

Some children, especially children younger than 2 years, may develop a bacterial ear infection immediately after or during an upper respiratory tract infection (see “Ear Infection” on page 69).

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