

## **Dealing With The Common Cold**

*The University of Pittsburgh  
Office of Child Development*

Allison's grandmother was shocked to see the five-year-old going off to kindergarten with freshly-washed, wet hair. "That's why she gets so many colds," Grandma said.

Allison has had her share of colds. But Grandma's wet-hair theory – although a popular one – is technically all wet. Wet hair or cold weather or drafty rooms do not directly cause colds, but such conditions can make the body more susceptible to catching them.

Viruses cause colds.

Allison likely catches her cold viruses in kindergarten. Cold viruses are contagious, especially during the first three to four days a child has a cold. When one child in school has a cold, several classmates often catch it.

There is no vaccination for a cold. But you can take steps to minimize the risk of your child catching one.

Hand-washing kills germs. You, your child's caregivers, and your child should wash hands regularly and thoroughly with soap, especially after using the toilet and before eating. Discourage your child from touching his or her nose, mouth, or eyes, especially if your child has a habit of placing fingers in the mouth. Also, teach your child to sneeze into a handkerchief or tissue. This will help keep your child's hands relatively clean and virus-free.

There is no cure for a cold and antibiotics do not help. While several over-the-counter medications may provide temporary relief for some symptoms, consult your doctor before giving medications. Use an alternative to aspirin to treat a virus-related illness, such as a cold. Aspirin is associated with Reye's syndrome, a rare but potentially fatal nerve disorder.

Plenty of rest and fluids often help speed recovery from a cold, which usually last 5-7 days. Removing the mucus that accumulates in the nose may help your child sleep and eat better. Try to have your child gently blow his or her nose. Use a cool mist – not steam – humidifier to help keep mucus loose.

When to call the doctor depends on several factors, including the symptoms and your child's age. Ask your doctor what symptoms should prompt a call to the office.

The cold is the most common childhood illness and is usually not a serious health problem. But your child should be made as comfortable as possible and watched carefully to make sure he or she is making a steady recovery.

*This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.*