A GUIDE FOR PARENTS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Runny Nose (with green or yellow mucus)

GET SMART
Know When Antibiotics Work

Your child has a runny nose. This is a normal part of what happens during the common cold and as it gets better. Here are some facts about colds and runny noses.

What causes a runny nose during a cold?

When germs that cause colds first infect the nose and sinuses, the nose makes clear mucus. This helps wash the germs from the nose and sinuses. After two or three days, the body's immune cells fight back, changing the mucus to a white or yellow color. As the bacteria that live in the nose grow back, they may also be found in the mucus, which changes the mucus to a greenish color. This is normal and does not mean your child needs an antibiotic.

What should I do?

- The best treatment is to wait and watch your child. Runny nose, cough, and symptoms like fever, headache, and muscle aches may be bothersome, but antibiotics will not make them go away any faster.
- Some people find that using a cool mist vaporizer or saltwater nose drops makes their child feel better.

Are antibiotics ever needed for a runny nose?

Antibiotics are needed only if your healthcare provider tells you that your child has sinusitis. Your child's healthcare provider may prescribe other medicine or give you tips to help with a cold's other symptoms like fever and cough, but antibiotics are not needed to treat the runny nose.

Why not try antibiotics now?

Taking antibiotics when they are not needed can be harmful. Each time people take antibiotics, they are more likely to carry resistant germs in their noses and throats. These resistant germs cannot be killed by common antibiotics. Your child may need more costly antibiotics, antibiotics given by a needle, or may even need to be in the hospital to get antibiotics. Since a runny nose almost always gets better on its own, it is better to wait and take antibiotics only when they are needed.

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