

COLDS AND ASTHMA

Statement of the Problem

Viral infections are one of the most frequent asthma triggers. Knowing how to prevent upper respiratory infections, how to treat them and when to seek medical help is the key to managing asthma.

Background

- Colds (viruses) are one of the most frequent asthma triggers.
- It's very important to watch for asthma signs and symptoms at the first sign of a cold.
- Use a peak flow meter at the first sign of a cold to check on asthma control.
- Some providers will tell adults or parents of children with asthma to increase the dose of their controller medication at the first sign of a cold.
- The flu shot does not prevent colds, but it does prevent the flu, a more serious infection caused by the influenza virus. Children with asthma should get a flu shot every year. People with asthma often get much sicker than other people if they get the flu because their asthma gets worse. Flu vaccine should not be given with the expectation that it will either reduce the frequency or severity of asthma attacks during the flu season. All of their family members who are older than 6 months should also get a flu immunization (shot or nasal spray) to prevent giving the flu to the person with asthma. (See information sheet on influenza.)

ASSESSMENT

None

Educational Messages

WHAT IS A COLD?

A cold is an infection that can affect nose, throat, sinuses and ears. Colds are caused by viruses. The common cold is passed from person to person, usually by touching a person who has a cold, or touching something that that person has touched (like a door knob)—and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. Colds can also be spread in the air from sneezing and coughing.

Colds can occur at any time of year, but are more common during the winter months. The average person has 5-7 colds a year, although children or preschoolers can have them more frequently.

Symptoms of colds may include: runny or stuffy nose, fever and sore throat, cough, hoarseness, red eyes, swollen lymph nodes in the neck, headache, poor appetite, loss of energy and muscle aches.

If you get a cold, the best thing to do is to get plenty of rest, drink lots of fluids and try to stay comfortable. There is no cure for a cold. Antibiotics do not help a cold.

The most important thing about colds is PREVENTION. Prevention includes:

- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose.
- Throwing out used tissues in the trash as soon as you can.
- Washing hands frequently especially when you are sick or around someone who is sick.
- Keeping hands away from face especially eyes and nose. Viruses are spread by touching the nose or mucus of someone with a cold and then touching someone else.
- Trying to stay home if you have a cough and fever.

Also:

- Don't share things like cigarettes, towels, toys, or anything else that might be contaminated with respiratory germs.
- Don't share food, utensils, or beverage containers with others.
- If asked to, use face-masks provided in your doctor's or clinic waiting room and follow their instructions to help stop the spread of germs.

Making sure that people get enough sleep and eat well also helps to prevent colds. For young babies (less than 2 months) try to avoid contact with people who have colds, and try to avoid crowds and gatherings because someone almost certainly has a cold.

WHY IS HAND WASHING SO IMPORTANT?

- Washing your hands and your children's hands is the best thing that you can do to stop the spread of germs. Germs—such as bacteria and viruses—are spread in many ways:
- Through droplets in the air after someone sneezes or coughs
- Through dirty hands (that have picked up germs from somewhere)
- Through contaminated surfaces such as doorknobs, toys, (that have been touched by hands that have germs on them).
- The moment that you finish washing your hands, you start to collect germs again by opening doors, and wiping faces. You cannot avoid collecting germs, but you can reduce the chance of spreading infection by knowing when to wash your hands.

WHEN SHOULD I WASH MY HANDS?

- before eating and cooking
- after using the bathroom
- after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, or after touching used tissues or handkerchiefs
- after visiting or taking care of any sick friend or relatives

WHAT IS A GOOD HAND WASHING ROUTINE?

1. Wet your hands under running water. Warm water is best. (You can also use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.)
2. Scrub your hands with soap or hand sanitizer for a count of five. If you want to be really safe, wash as long as it takes to sing Happy Birthday.”
3. You may want to use hand lotion after washing your hands to prevent your skin from getting sore

There is no “cure” for a cold. Our bodies fight off colds without any need for medicines. We cannot make a cold go away any faster with MEDICINES; although some medicines can help RELIEVE THE SYMPTOMS.

HOME TREATMENT

Although many people use medicines to make themselves feel better when they have a cold, there are several things that you can do AT HOME that may be better than taking medicine:

1. Have the sick person drink lots of clear fluids, especially warm drinks or soup. Many people lose their appetite with a cold, and may drink less as well. By encouraging them to drink more, you will help make the mucus thinner, and make them more comfortable.
2. Use salt water drops (1/4 tsp salt to 1 cup water) to relieve a stuffy nose if it interferes with eating or sleeping.
3. A steamy shower or bowl filled with warm water (inhale the steam by standing over the bowl with a towel over the head) can also help relieve congestion. For a person with asthma, do not use a humidifier because it can contribute to the creation of mold.
4. Use Vaseline (petroleum jelly) around your or your child’s nose to help prevent it from becoming sore.
5. Help the ill person get extra rest.

OVER THE COUNTER MEDICINES

Most over-the-counter cold remedies or tablets are not necessary. Nothing can make a cold go away faster. Do not give leftover antibiotics for colds because they have no effect on viruses, and may be harmful. Especially avoid drugs that have several ingredients because there is a greater chance of side effects from these drugs.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

- Call the doctor if you or your child have any of the following symptoms:
- Difficulty breathing or is breathing fast.
- Fever that lasts for more than 2 days.
- Chills or fever over 39 degrees C (or 102 degrees F).
- Nasal discharge lasting more than 14 days.
- Earache.
- Eye discharge.
- Cough that lasts for more than 2 weeks or becomes worse, or barky.
- Headache or stiff neck.
- Sore throat that lasts for more than 48 hours.
- If you or your child seem more sick than a regular cold, or you are worried.

Actions

CHW ACTIONS	CLIENT ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review cold prevention measures e.g. hand washing, avoiding contact with ill people, covering nose/mouth when coughing sneezing. • Review cold management/home treatment measures. • Review symptoms that indicate the provider should be contacted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice cold prevention measures. • Practice Home Treatment measures to ease a cold's discomfort. • Contact the provider as needed when symptoms of more severe infection are present.

Follow-up Visits

Supplies

Education Handouts

- Cover your Cough
- How to Treat Your Child's Cough or Cold at Home

Referrals

