

Diagnostic Findings

- The child complains of a sore throat.
- In children too young to talk, a sore throat may be suspected if they refuse to eat or begin to cry during feedings.
- When examined with a light, the throat is bright red.

Cause

Most sore throats are caused by viruses and are part of a cold. About 10% of sore throats are due to the strep bacteria. A throat culture or rapid strep test is the only way to distinguish strep pharyngitis from viral pharyngitis. Without treatment, a strep throat can have some rare but serious complications. Tonsillitis (temporary swelling and redness of the tonsils) is usually present with any throat infection, viral or bacterial. The presence of tonsillitis does not have any special meaning.

Children who sleep with their mouths open often wake in the morning with a dry mouth and sore throat. It clears within an hour of having something to drink. Use a humidifier to help prevent this problem. Children with a postnasal drip from draining sinuses often have a sore throat from frequent throat clearing.

Expected Course

Sore throats with viral illnesses usually last 3 or 4 days. Strep throat responds well to penicillin. After taking the medication for 24 hours, your child is no longer contagious and can return to day care or school if the fever is gone and he's feeling better.

Call our office immediately if:

- The pain is severe.
- Your child is drooling, spitting, or having great difficulty in swallowing.
- Your child can't fully open his mouth.
- Breathing is difficult and is not due to a stuffy nose.
- Your child is acting very sick.

During regular hours

- To make an appointment for a throat culture for any other child with a sore throat.

EXCEPTION: If the sore throat is very mild and the main symptom is croup, hoarseness, or a cough, a throat culture is probably not needed. Throat cultures are recommended for all other sore throats because a resurgence of acute rheumatic fever began in 1987. Rheumatic fever is a complication of strep infections that can lead to permanent damage to the valves of the heart.

HOME CARE

Local Pain Relief. Children over 8 years of age can gargle with warm salt water (½ teaspoon of salt per glass) or an antacid solution. Children over 4 years of age can suck on hard candy (butterscotch seems to be a soothing flavor) as often as necessary. Younger children can be given 1 teaspoon of corn syrup periodically to soothe the throat. Swollen tonsils can make some foods hard to swallow. Provide your child with a soft diet for a few days if he prefers it.

Fever. Acetaminophen may be given for a few days if your child has a fever over 102.0 F (39.0 C) or a great deal of throat discomfort.

Common Mistakes in Treating Sore Throat

- Avoid expensive throat sprays or throat lozenges. Not only are they no more effective than hard candy, but also many contain an ingredient (benzocaine) that may cause a drug reaction.
- Avoid using leftover antibiotics from siblings or friends. These should be thrown out because they deteriorate faster than other drugs. Unfortunately, antibiotics only help strep throats. They have no effect on viruses, and they can cause harm. They also make it difficult to find out what is wrong if your child becomes sicker.

Rapid Strep Tests. Rapid strep tests are helpful only when their results are positive. If they are negative, a throat culture should be performed to pick up the 20% of strep infections that the rapid tests miss. Avoid rapid strep tests performed in shopping malls or at home because they tend to be inaccurate.

Call our office later if:

- A sunburned-looking rash appears.
- Breathing or swallowing becomes difficult.
- A fever lasts more than 3 days.

DEFINITION

Diagnostic Findings

- The cough reflex expels air from the lungs with a sudden explosive noise.
- Cough can be dry and hacking or wet and productive.
- A coughing spasm is more than 5 minutes of continuous coughing.

Similar Conditions

- Croup

Cause

Most coughs are due to a viral infection of the trachea (windpipe) and bronchi (larger air passages). These infections are called tracheitis and bronchitis, respectively. Most children get this infection a couple of times every year as part of a cold. Keep in mind that coughing clears the lungs and protects them from pneumonia. Bronchitis isn't serious. The role of milk in thickening the secretions is doubtful.

Expected Course

Usually bronchitis gives a dry tickly cough that lasts for 2 to 3 weeks. Sometimes it becomes loose (wet) for a few days and your child coughs up a lot of phlegm (mucus). This is usually a sign that the end of the illness is near.

HOME CARE

Medicines to Loosen the Cough and Thin the Secretions

- Cough drops: Most coughs in children over 4 years of age can be controlled by sucking on cough drops freely. Any brand will do.
- Homemade cough syrup: For children under age 4 years, use 1 teaspoon of honey or corn syrup instead. (Don't use honey for babies under 1 year of age.)
- Warm liquids for coughing spasms: Warm liquids usually relax the airway and loosen the mucus. Start with warm lemonade, warm apple juice, or warm tea. Add some honey (corn syrup for babies under 1 year of age). Avoid adding any alcohol because inhaling the alcohol fumes stimulates additional coughing and also because there is a risk of intoxication from unintentional overdose.

Cough Suppressants. Cough suppressants reduce the cough reflex, which protects the lungs. They are only indi-

cated for dry coughs that interfere with sleep, school attendance, or work. They also help children who have chest pain from coughing spasms. They should not be given to infants under 12 months of age or for wet coughs.

A nonprescription cough suppressant is dextromethorphan (DM). Ask your pharmacist for help in choosing a brand that contains DM without any other active ingredients. Dosage is 0.2 mg/lb every 4 to 6 hours as needed. It usually comes as a liquid in the strength of 15 mg/teaspoon. The following table shows the dosages of D.M that you can give a child according to weight or age.

WEIGHT OF CHILD	DOSAGE OF DM (IN MG)
20lb	4
30lb	6
4-6 yr	7.5
7-12 yr	15
Adults	30

Often corn syrup or cough drops can be given during the day and DM given at bedtime and during the night. DM is also available as a cough lozenge for easy carrying and as a long-acting (12-hour) liquid.

Humidifiers in the Treatment of Cough. Dry air tends to make coughs worse. Dry coughs can be loosened by encouraging a good fluid intake and using a humidifier in your child's bedroom.

The new ultrasonic humidifiers are very quiet, and they kill molds and most bacteria found in the water. If possible, use distilled water instead of tap water in the humidifier. The Environmental Protection Agency reported in 1988 that tap water may contain harmful minerals (such as lead and asbestos). These minerals are present in the mist produced by ultrasonic humidifiers. Frequent inhaling of these particles may cause chronic lung problems. Don't add medication to the water in the humidifier because it irritates the cough in some children.

Active and Passive Smoking. Teenagers will find that physical education classes and exercise trigger coughing spasms when they have bronchitis. If so, such physical activity should be avoided temporarily. Don't let anyone smoke around your coughing child. Remind the teenager who smokes that his cough may last weeks longer than it normally would without smoking.

Common Mistakes in Treating Cough. Antihistamines, decongestants, and antipyretics are found in many cough syrups. These ingredients are of unproven value, and the antihistamines carry the risk of sedation. Expectorants are of unproven value but harmless. Stay with the simple remedies mentioned above or use dextromethorphan (DM). Milk does not need to be eliminated from the diet, since restricting it only improves the cough if your child is allergic to milk. Also, never stop breast-feeding because of a cough.

CALL OUR OFFICE

IMMEDIATELY if

- Breathing becomes difficult and is not better after you clear the nose.
- Breathing becomes fast or labored (when your child is not coughing).
- Your child passes out with coughing spasms.
- The lips turn bluish with coughing spasms.
- Any blood-tinged sputum is coughed up.
- Your child starts acting very sick.