

## Common Health Problems

Parents, teachers, and other caregivers need to be alert for health problems among the children in their care. This chart identifies the symptoms, causes, and treatment of some common health problems during childhood.

| Problem  | Treatment  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Brochiolitis</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> Difficulty breathing, wheezing on exhaling, may refuse fluids; affects infants most<br/> <i>Cause:</i> Infections of the bronchioles—small tubes in the lungs</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact a doctor. This condition requires medical treatment.</li> <li>• Some cases can be treated with medication. Most children with bronchiolitis need to be hospitalized.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Cold</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> Runny nose, slight fever, less appetite, sore throat, cough<br/> <i>Cause:</i> Viral infection of the upper respiratory tract</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the child is younger than six months, contact a doctor.</li> <li>• If the child is older than six months, treat at home unless the cough persists for a week, there is pain in the ear, mucus that had been clear becomes thick and green, or temperature exceeds 102°F (30.9°C).</li> <li>• Rest, plenty of fluids, food that is easy to digest.</li> <li>• Give acetaminophen to reduce fever.</li> <li>• Use a cold-water vaporizer to keep the air moist. This will help keep the nasal passages moist and help the child breathe.</li> </ul>    |
| <p><b>Conjunctivitis</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> White of the eye becomes red<br/> <i>Cause:</i> Infection</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact the doctor. If an infection is present, the doctor will prescribe eye drops.</li> <li>• Use the eye drops and clean the eye with a clean, damp cloth as directed. <i>Never</i> give another person’s prescription or a previously opened bottle of medication to anyone.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Diarrhea</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> Loose, watery bowel movements<br/> <i>Cause:</i> An infection of the intestinal tract</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With infants, continue breast-feeding. If bottle-feeding, doctor may advise changing to water or an electrolyte solution (water with important minerals) until the diarrhea stops.</li> <li>• If combined with vomiting, give the child an electrolyte solution which can be purchased at a drugstore.</li> <li>• <i>Do not</i> give the child sugary or salty foods or liquids.</li> <li>• Watch for dehydration. If the child urinates less frequently than normal or has a very dry mouth, he or she may be dehydrated. Contact a doctor.</li> </ul> |

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| Problem  | Treatment   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Ear Infection</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> Pain in the ear, fever<br/> <i>Cause:</i> Infection of the middle ear</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact a doctor, who will prescribe an antibiotic. Give the medicine for the full length of time that the doctor instructs.</li> <li>• Watch for dehydration. If the child urinates less frequently than normal or has a very dry mouth, he or she may be dehydrated. Contact a doctor.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Flu</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> High fever; chills and shakes; fatigue; body aches<br/> <i>Cause:</i> Viral infection of the respiratory tract</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rest, plenty of fluids, food that is easy to digest.</li> <li>• If over 6 months, give acetaminophen to relieve body aches and lower fever.<br/> <i>Never</i> give aspirin to a child. Doing so may cause Reye syndrome, a serious illness.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Roseola</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> High fever for three to five days followed by a pink rash on the child’s chest and back<br/> <i>Cause:</i> Viral infection that primarily affects children under age two</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After 24 hours of fever, contact the doctor.</li> <li>• Give acetaminophen to relieve fever symptoms. Can also give a sponge bath using barely cool water.</li> <li>• Give plenty of liquids.</li> <li>• Once the rash appears, keep the child away from other children until the rash disappears.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Sore Throat</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> Soreness or burning in the throat, difficulty swallowing<br/> <i>Cause:</i> Viral infection or, if strep throat, bacterial infection</p>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call the doctor if a sore throat persists for even a few hours, especially if the child is extremely ill, has difficulty breathing, or has trouble swallowing.</li> <li>• If the child has strep throat, the doctor will prescribe an antibiotic. If so, be sure to give the medication for the full period so the infection will not spread.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Vomiting</b><br/> <i>Symptoms:</i> Spitting up food from the stomach<br/> <i>Cause:</i> Usually a viral infection of the intestines, but may have other causes</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the first 24 hours, give the child only clear liquids to eat.</li> <li>• Two to three hours after the last vomiting, give water every half hour for two hours. If the water is retained, alternate water and an electrolyte solution. Then add milk or formula.</li> <li>• After a day on this liquid diet, begin a normal diet.</li> <li>• Watch for dehydration, severe stomach pain, signs of blood or bile (a green liquid), and vomiting that continues more than 24 hours. If these signs appear, see a doctor.</li> </ul> |

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### Taking Action

Make a poster alerting first-time parents to the symptoms of one common illness and how to respond. Research additional information on the illness using trusted sources.

## Know Your Medicine Cabinet

A well-stocked medicine cabinet makes it easier to give appropriate first aid or care to a sick child. Remember to keep all medicines out of reach of children, preferably in a locked box. Check items regularly, replacing those that are out-of-date or used up.

### MEDICINAL ITEMS

- **Analgesics** (ibuprofen or acetaminophen). Used to relieve minor aches and pains such as headaches, to reduce fever, and to relieve some cold and flu symptoms. Never give aspirin to a child. Doing so increases the risk of developing Reye's syndrome, a serious illness.
- **Antihistamines and decongestants.** Used to reduce congestion and swelling. Antihistamines also relieve minor allergic reactions, such as hives or itching, caused by insect bites.
- **Antibiotic cream.** Helps prevent infection in minor cuts, scrapes, scratches, and abrasions.
- **Antiseptic solution** (hydrogen peroxide or rubbing alcohol). Used to clean and sterilize an area.
- **Baking soda.** Can relieve itching caused by stings and abrasions.
- **Calamine lotion.** Used to relieve skin irritations, poison ivy, poison oak, insect bites, and sunburn.
- **Cough syrup.** Helps treat minor coughs.
- **Hydrocortisone cream.** Used to reduce swelling and itching caused by allergic reactions.
- **Insect repellent.** Helps to keep biting insects away.
- **Lip balm.** Soothes chapped lips.

- **Mineral oil.** Used to dislodge ticks or remove foreign objects from ears.
- **Nose drops.** Help clear nasal mucus.
- **Petroleum jelly.** Used for minor skin irritations, abrasions, dryness, and chapped areas.
- **Sunscreen.** Helps prevent sunburn.

### FIRST-AID ITEMS

- **Bandages and dressings.** Used to cover wounds and burns and to help control bleeding. Useful items include a box of adhesive bandages, rolled gauze, tape, a triangular bandage, and an assortment of sterile nonstick adhesive pads.
- **Cotton.** Used to apply antiseptic solutions and lotions.
- **Elastic bandage.** Wraps sprained joints to provide support.
- **Flashlight and extra batteries.** Needed for power outages.
- **Heating pad.** Soothes aches and pains.
- **Instant cold packs.** Used to reduce swelling.
- **Plastic gloves.** Wear when cleaning wounds.
- **Rubber nose syringe with plastic tip.** Used to clear out a baby's nose during a cold.
- **Scissors.** Used to cut bandages and tape.
- **Spoon tube.** Accurately measures the proper dosage of medicine for a child.
- **Thermometers.** Used to take children's temperatures.
- **Tweezers.** Helps remove splinters.

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While learning first-aid procedures is very important, keep a first-aid manual with your supplies. Also keep a list of emergency phone numbers in case you need to call for help. Sometimes it is more difficult to think clearly when there is an emergency.

When there is a serious medical emergency, health care professionals need accurate informa-

tion fast. You can make a simple chart for each family member with the person's name, height, and weight; allergies; medications the person is taking; long-term medical conditions; immunizations; and hospitalizations and operations. This information can help doctors make decisions in an emergency.

**Taking Action**

Go to a drugstore, supermarket, or discount store with this list and check the price of each item. Write down the prices of all the items and total them to find the cost of stocking a medicine cabinet. Compare your total cost with that of your classmates.

| Item                                | Price | Item                     | Price |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
| Analgesics                          | _____ | Sunscreen                | _____ |
| Antihistamines and<br>decongestants | _____ | Bandages and dressings   | _____ |
| Antibiotic cream                    | _____ | Cotton                   | _____ |
| Antiseptic solution                 | _____ | Elastic bandage          | _____ |
| Baking soda                         | _____ | Flashlight and batteries | _____ |
| Calamine lotion                     | _____ | Heating pad              | _____ |
| Cough syrup                         | _____ | Instant cold pack        | _____ |
| Hydrocortisone cream                | _____ | Plastic gloves           | _____ |
| Insect repellent                    | _____ | Rubber nose syringe      | _____ |
| Lip balm                            | _____ | Scissors                 | _____ |
| Mineral oil                         | _____ | Spoon tube               | _____ |
| Nose drops                          | _____ | Thermometers             | _____ |
| Petroleum jelly                     | _____ | Tweezers                 | _____ |
| <b>Total Cost:</b>                  | _____ |                          |       |

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