Oh no, it’s the back to school cold!

Mr. Germ was excited to join the class this year as mystery reader until he saw the hand sanitizer on the back to school supply list.

Your child went back to school a couple of weeks ago, you’ve been to back to school night, and now, right on time, many of your children have… THE BACK TO SCHOOL COLD. What to do with this cold?

Whether caught from the toddler room or from the middle school hallway, most back to school colds look the same. Your child will start with a day of extra grumpiness or vague complaints about feeling tired or having a sore throat, followed by a runny nose
the next day, and then a cough a couple of days later. If your child has a fever from a cold, it starts during the first or second day. Some kids get watery eyes or a small amount of

mucus from their eyes, to match their runny noses. To add insult to injury, some kids produce loose stools or vomit mucus. Many lose their appetites. In general symptoms build on days 0-2, peak at days 3-5, gradually get better days 6-7, and linger for the next week.

Colds are viruses and do not improve with antibiotics, but it is important to be on the look out for superimposed bacterial infections. In other words, cold viruses can irritate the body and make the body more susceptible to bacterial infections (pus producing infections) like ear infections or pneumonias. Unlike colds, bacterial infections can be eradicated with the help of antibiotics.

Here is what you can expect from a back to school cold and how you can help your child feel better:

Sore throat

- **Expect** sore throat for at least the first 2-3 days.
- **Treat** pain so that your kid hydrates without pain on swallowing. You can give acetaminophen (i.e. Tylenol) or ibuprofen (i.e. Motrin, Advil).
  We have a post devoted to ways to soothe a sore throat here. And this post can help you decide whether your child needs to be tested for strep throat.

Fever

- **Expect** fever to start within the first 2 days of cold symptoms and to last at least 2-3 days. If it lasts more than 4-5 days, call your child's doctor.
- **Treat** discomfort with fever reducing medicine if needed. Read helpful information about fever here.

Runny/stuffy nose

- **Expect** your child to have a runny, stuffy nose for as long as 2-3 weeks. Sinus infections are explained here.

- **Treat** your baby or young child's stuffy nose with suction and saline (salt water) nose drops to help clear mucus. Although older kids can blow their nose, they can also use saline nose drops and take long warm showers to relieve nasal congestion. See other ways to treat cold symptoms here.

Cough

- **Expect** the cough to get worse on days 3, 4 and 5 of the cold, and to last for as long as 2-3 weeks. Here is our post on how to tell if your child is handling her cough or if the cough is a harbinger of asthma or pneumonia.
- **Treat** cough with extra fluids, and you can give honey if your child is over one year old. If your child has asthma, follow their asthma treatment plan. Remember to stay away from over-the-counter cough medications.

Sorry, we don't have a vaccine against the many viral germs that cause the common cold. But we do have one against the viral germ called influenza, better known as "the flu." The flu is much more severe than a cold, so if your child is miserable from their cold, imagine how they will feel if they catch the flu (read here to tell the difference between colds vs flu).

Who knows, maybe this back to school cold will be the last cold of the school year. Here's to hoping!

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