

COUGH

DEFINITION

- The cough reflex expels air from the lungs with sudden explosive noise.
- A coughing spasm is more than 5 minutes of continuous coughing.

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 is not serious. The role of milk in thickening 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

Warm liquids for coughing spasms: Warm liquids usually relax the airway and loosen the mucus.

Cough Suppressants

The cough associated with viral or bacterial infections is a reflex that protects the lungs. Cough suppressants reduce the cough reflex and are, therefore, only indicated for dry coughs that interfere with sleep, school attendance, or work. They may also help children who have chest pain during coughing spasms. They should not be given to infants under 12 months of age or for wet coughs. Cough suppressants are NOT recommended for patients with asthma.

A non-prescription cough suppressant is dextromethorphan (DM). Delsym is an over-the-counter cough suppressant that contains dextromethorphan. It may be given every 12 hours to children 4 years of age and over. Dosage chart is on the packaging.

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. Do not 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, physical activity should be avoided temporarily. Do not 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 fever reducers 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).

Call our office immediately if:

- Breathing becomes difficult *and* is not better after you clear the nose.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

Call our office during office hours:

- For a fever that lasts more than 3 days.
- If the cough lasts more than 3 weeks.
- You have other concerns or questions.