

Your Child is coughing ... Who is the culprit?

A cough is usually a reflex to clear the airways of irritating material. It is an essential defense mechanism to keep the lungs clear of viruses, bacterial, and other foreign objects. Under normal conditions, the lining of the respiratory tract, from the nose to the lungs, continuously traps dust, viruses, bacteria, and other pollutants on a thin coat of mucus. When children get a respiratory tract infec-

tion, the cilia become disabled disrupting nature's cleaning system. Coughing takes over for the inactivated cilia to help keep the airway clean.

Coughing does not always mean there is a problem with your child. Normal children can cough 1 to 34 times a day and have coughing episodes lasting up to a couple of weeks. However, continuous coughing as frequent as 10-15 coughs an hour and at night after going to sleep is almost always abnormal and needs medical attention.

Causes

Children without asthma, allergies or sinusitis can have a cough after viral respiratory infections lasting for weeks. There is no specific therapy for this cough and it does eventually resolve.

Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke and other pollutants (smoke and exhaust from wood burning, air pollution and exhaust from vehicles) is associated with increased cough in healthy children and may worsen the cough associated with asthma or rhinitis.

Some Cough Facts

- When a yellow or green nasal discharge, headache, sore throat and a foul breath odor are associated with a cough, the cause is most likely due to a sinus infection.
- A cough that starts shortly after choking on a nut, popcorn or a toy may suggest a foreign object lodged in the respiratory tract

The symptom of cough can be caused by numerous ailments. It is difficult for pediatricians to recommend what medication or measures will truly help the child without checking the child over to determine the exact cause



Causes

A cough could be caused by many different forms of illness:

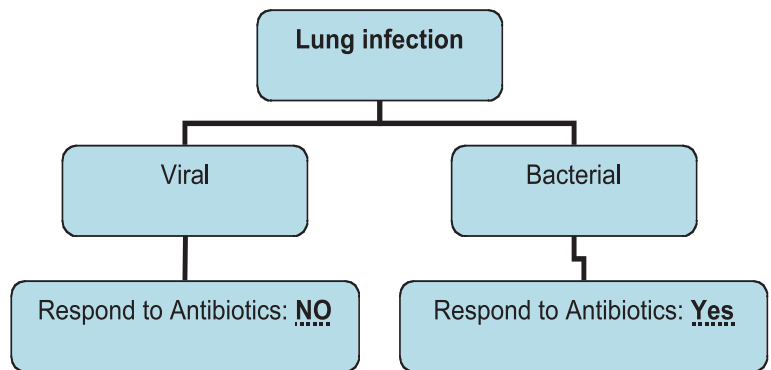
Cause	Indications or example
Sinus drainage/infections	Drainage in the back of the throat, from the sinuses, can cause a "post—nasal drip"; which may lead to a cough
Lung/airway infections	As bronchitis and pneumonia; most bacterial origin infections respond well to antibiotics
Any non—infectious irritations of the airway	As inhalation of chemicals, allergens, or irritating substances (cigarette smoke, gasoline, etc.).
Viral colds	produces mucus secretions in the nose, throat, and upper airways; antibiotics are of no use
Allergy	Leads to mucus production and irritation of same parts of the airways.
Asthma/wheezing	This narrowing of the air sacs causes a cough of varying degree. For children with asthma, cough is a common symptom (along with wheezing and shortness of breath). In some children, cough is the only symptom noticed by the child or parent.

Others: Postnasal drip due to rhinitis (inflammation in the nasal passages) is another common cause of cough that can become chronic

- A short, dry, wheezing cough is heard in asthma, bronchitis or pneumonia
- Because the majority of respiratory illnesses are caused by viruses, doctors typically do not prescribe antibiotics for coughs.
- Allergies, asthma, colds, and other respiratory infections are the usual culprits of daytime coughs

Treatment

Viral-caused cough does not need treatment and will resolve on its own after 10-15 days. Chronic cough, on the other hand, caused by asthma, rhinitis or sinusitis should be treated depending on the underlying cause. Parents should contact a doctor if a cough changes in character, trial therapy shows no signs of reducing the cough, your child begins to



cough up blood and/or the cough interferes with the activities of daily living or sleep.

Don'ts for parents

- Home treatments should never take the place of consulting your child's doctor for any health problem
- Do not give your child (especially a baby or toddler) over the counter cough medicine without specific instructions to do so from your child's doctor.
- Cough drops, which are fine for older children, are a choking hazard for young children