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Cold

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What is a cold? In short, we can say that a cold is each of the circumstances including nasal blockage, rise in mucosity and cough which are experienced in the winter season and, due to which, children are called "squirt".

Within a cold, technically called "high respiratory infection" or "cold of respiratory tract, a variety of symptons are included. Their origin lays in the inflammation of the respiratory mucosa which extends from the nose up to the bronchial tube. Depending on the dominating symptons (they are usually combined) we may say it is rhinitis (nasal mucosity), pharyngitis (sore throat), laryngitis (cough) or bronchitis (cough and respiratory noises). Colds can be accompanied by fever and fever is more frequent when the patients are young.

Colds are very frequent and they may be treated by a pediatrician. This kind of respiratory infections are normally self-limited, they get cured without any treatment within a few days and have no after-effects.

What are the causes? How are they transmited? Viruses are almost the only cause of colds and it is estimated that there are more than 200 kinds of virus involved in the process. The dominating family of these microorganisms are called rinovirus.

The infection is transmited from an infected person to a healthy person by means of the secretions of the respiratory tract (mucus) which are expelled into the air when coughing or sneezing or by means of contaminated objects with these secretions. The entrance can be the mouth, the nose or the smooth skin which covers our eyes. It is proved that hands can be a vehicle to transmit respiratory infections as well. Regarding babies, the transmision is favoured by facts such as sharing items and toys that are sucked and by the tendency to have direct contact with hands and face (sometimes with teeth too).

Which is the typical evolution? If fever is present, it does not usually last more than 3 or 4 days. Nasal and throat symptons last a week but cough is lasting and normally it can last 2 or 3 weeks.

Nasal mucosity varies in the course of the iones: initially, it seems as it was water going through your nose but then it gets thicker and become whitish mucus. Then, these turn into yellow and greenish and so, they last for some days. This does not mean there is a complication or the need of antibiotic treatment.

Why are children usually afected by cold? Firstly, because they live together with other people who infects them. They are in contact with other children (in parks, kindergartens or at school) and adults who transmits the virus of cold to them.

And secondly, because their immunity is not mature so their defense system "does not know" all these microbes and so, they get infected more easily.

On average, it is estimated that a normal adult person suffers from 1 or 2 colds a year and a child between 5 and 6. Nevertheless, this will depend on the moment of childhood, with a peak moment at the beginning of school years or kindergarten. This situation of high risk is transitory and within two years, the number of colds clearly decreases. At the first years of life, this stage seems to be compulsory and colds are usually suffered. This is supported by the fact that children, who have attended kindergarten previously, then at school are usually less absent than their classmates who are "new" in the cold world.

It is interesting to clarify that children do not a get because of going to the playground. The transmision of colds produces more easily in closed spaces (the classroom) because the contact is narrower. Furthermore, as there is less ventilation, the coughs and sneezes of the affected ones loads the atmosphere with viruses which are inhaled by the healthy ones.

How is it treated? The main objective of a cold treatment is to relieve its symptons, as we cannot attack its origin, and avoid or be aware of further complications. Above all, we need to bear in mind the natural tendency of these process of spontaneous cure. That means that we need to try to avoid the provokation of side effects due to the treatment used.

One of the most efficient measures to relieve is nasal washing with saline solution. For babies, it is advisable

to use a nasal inhalator before going to bed. This can be bought in chemist's. The use of medicines, but antithermical analgesics (paracetamol, ibupruphen) has no remarkable effects to recommend its general use. It is important to know that the treatment of a cold with antibiotic drugs does not make it shorter or reduce the possibilities of complications. Hence, it contributes to the developments of endurance to these drugs.

Can colds be avoided? Nowadays there is not an efficient vaccine against cold because of the large amount of microbes which can trigger this illness. However, there is a "partial solution": the annual vaccine against cold. We must take into account that if you get it, you are only protected against cold and not against all the possible triggering forces of colds.

Another preventing strategy, more difficult to put in practice, is to avoid contact with infected people. Nonetheless, it is important to tell parents that frequent handwashing is one of the best habits to avoid the transmision of infectious illnesses.

My child has a cold, when should I take him/her to the pediatrician? Colds which do not get complicated get cured by themselves and need no drug treatment. Parents must pay attention to detect further complications. These are produced by bacteria which cause otitis, conjunctivitis or pneumonia. Fever lasting more than 3 days, ear pain, difficulties to breathe, thick nasal mucosity of yellow or greenish colour for more than 10 days or discomfort must be considered as a reason to visit the pediatrician.