

COUGH

- 1. Definition:** Coughing helps to clear the lungs and upper airways and prevent lung infection. Most coughs are caused by viral infections, occur during the winter months, and last about 10-14 days. Many accompany cold symptoms (see **COMMON COLD**). Some coughs sound barky and deep and are accompanied by hoarseness (see **CROUP**). Coughs that sound wheezy are most often due to mucous in the throat but might be a sign of a lung infection (bronchitis or pneumonia) or asthma. Viral bronchitis usually causes a dry tickly cough that lasts more than two weeks. Some illnesses cause coughing spasms or several minutes of continuous coughing. Allergies and exposure to smoke will also cause and/or prolong coughing. Parents are frequently fooled into thinking their child has chest congestion when they feel a rattle in their child's chest when they breathe. Mucous in the nose or throat will vibrate all the way down into the chest with breathing, especially in young children, and does not mean the child has bronchitis or pneumonia.
- 2. Treatment:**
 - a.** Since the purpose of a cough is to protect the airways and lungs, the best treatment is to loosen the cough and relax and soothe the throat rather than suppress the cough. Provide plenty of fluids during a coughing illness. Contrary to common belief, milk does not thicken mucous and should not be restricted, especially in the child who prefers milk. Cough drops and hard candies are helpful in children over age 4. Warm clear fluids are especially helpful in stopping coughing spasms. Run a humidifier in the bedroom, as dry air tends to make coughs worse.
 - b.** Cough suppressant medication may be used in children whose cough is severe and is causing problems at sleep, school, or work. It should not be used in children under age 6 without your doctor's advice. The best nonprescription cough suppressant is dextromethorphan (DM). Try to find a medicine with dextromethorphan as its only ingredient and follow the package directions. Multi-symptom cold preparations contain more medicine than is needed (antihistamines, decongestants) and often cause side effects such as sleep problems and crankiness. Expectorants do not work well in children.
- 3. Call our office during regular hours if:**
 - a.** The cough has lasted more than 2 weeks.
 - b.** Your child has a cough with fever over 103°F.
 - c.** The cough has lasted more than 3 days and your child is 1 to 3 months old.
 - d.** Your child is losing lots of sleep due to the cough.
 - e.** The cough has caused many coughing spasms or episodes of vomiting.
 - f.** The cough feels wheezy.
 - g.** Bloody mucous has been coughed up.
 - h.** Your child has bad chest pains with the cough.
 - i.** Your child has missed more than 3 days of school.

- j. The cause could be allergies.
 - k. Your child has asthma and is requiring numerous nebs.
 - l. Your infant is having trouble eating because of the cough.
- 4. Call our office urgently or go to the Emergency Department if:**
- a. Your child has difficulty getting air in or out from the chest or is breathing fast.
 - b. Your child is less than 1 month old and has coughed several times.
 - c. The lips turn blue with coughing.
 - d. Food, a toy, or other foreign object could be caught in the windpipe.
 - e. Your child acts or looks very sick.