

Viruses cause common illnesses that antibiotics CANNOT treat like:

- Colds
- Influenza (the flu)
- Runny noses
- Most coughs
- Most bronchitis
- Most sore throats
- Most sinus infections
- Some ear infections

Viral illnesses, like colds, usually go away without treatment in a week or two. Even many bacterial ear infections go away by themselves. When an antibiotic is not prescribed, ask your child's doctor or pharmacist what can be used to relieve symptoms.

Taking antibiotics for viral illnesses:

- Will NOT cure your child's illness
- Will NOT help your child feel better
- Will NOT keep others from catching your child's illness

Bacteria cause illnesses like strep throat that are often treated successfully with antibiotics.

Remember—there are potential risks when taking any prescription drug. Antibiotics should only be used when your child's doctor determines they are needed.

Antibiotic use can:

- Kill good bacteria in your child's body, which may lead to complications, such as diarrhea or yeast infection.
- Cause a serious allergic reaction that may require hospitalization.
- Result in an antibiotic-resistant infection. Resistant bacteria are stronger and harder to kill. They can stay in your child's body and can cause severe illnesses that cannot be cured with antibiotics. A cure for a resistant infection may require stronger treatment—and possibly a hospital stay.

Talk with your child's doctor about the best way to care for your child during this illness.

Get Smart symptom relief tips & tools for your child at: [www.cdc.gov/getsmart](http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)



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# Antibiotics Aren't Always the Answer

Most cough and cold illnesses are caused by viruses. ANTIBIOTIC use can only cure bacterial illnesses—not viral illnesses.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases

## SIX SIMPLE AND SMART FACTS ABOUT ANTIBIOTIC USE

### 1. Antibiotics are life-saving drugs

Using antibiotics wisely is the best way to preserve their strength for future bacterial illnesses.

### 2. Antibiotics only treat bacterial infections

If your child has a viral infection like a cold, talk to a doctor or pharmacist about symptom relief. This may include over-the-counter medicine, a humidifier, or warm liquids.

### 3. Some ear infections DO NOT require an antibiotic

A doctor can determine what kind of ear infection your child has and if antibiotics will help. The doctor may follow expert guidelines to wait for a couple of days before prescribing antibiotics since your child may get better without them.

### 4. Most sore throats DO NOT require an antibiotic

Only 1 in 5 children seen by a doctor for a sore throat has strep throat, which should be treated with an antibiotic. Your child's doctor can only confirm strep throat by running a test.

### 5. Green colored mucus is NOT a sign that an antibiotic is needed

As the body's immune system fights off an infection, mucus can change color. This is normal and does not mean your child needs an antibiotic.

### 6. There are potential risks when taking any prescription drug

Antibiotic use can cause complications, ranging from an upset stomach to a serious allergic reaction. Your child's doctor will weigh the risks and benefits before prescribing an antibiotic.

