

Viral illnesses are very common among children. Often children get 6 - 8 each year.

Antibiotics are not effective for viral illnesses and in most cases doctors will advise home care for its symptoms.

How long will a viral illness last?

Most viral illnesses will get better by themselves, but this might take longer than you expect.

Below is a list of some viral symptoms and their typical duration:

Runny nose	15 days
Cough	25 days
Sore throat	2-7 days
Fever	up to 5 days
Ear ache	7-8 days

What are typical symptoms and how can you help your child?

Cough

- Children often cough when they have a viral illness because of mucus trickling down the back of the throat.
- Although it is upsetting to hear your child cough, it helps clear the throat.
- If they are eating, drinking and breathing normally and there is no wheezing, there is usually nothing to worry about.
- Most coughs clear up within 3 weeks and do not require any treatment.
- Noisy chesty coughs are still often caused by viruses.

What you can do to help:

- Drinking lots of water will keep your child hydrated and replaces fluids lost when coughing and sneezing.
- If your child is over 1 year old, try a warm drink of lemon and honey.
- Cough medicines are not safe for children under 6 years and only potentially help to reduce symptoms, but will not help the cough get better faster.
- For more information see: <http://child-cough.bristol.ac.uk/>

Sore throat

- Your child's throat may be dry and sore.
- This is very common and usually nothing to worry about.
- Most sore throats are caused by minor viral illnesses such as colds or flu and can be treated at home.
- They normally get better within a week.

What you can do to help:

- You can give your child paracetamol or ibuprofen as directed on the medicine packaging.
- Provide little and often cool or warm fluids, and avoid very hot drinks.
- Give your child cool, soft foods.
- Homemade mouthwash of warm, salty water can help.
- Your child can suck lozenges, hard sweets, ice cubes or ice lollies – but don't give them anything small and hard because of the risk of choking.

Fever / high temperature

- Your child may have a fever if they: feel hotter than usual; feel sweaty or clammy; have flushed cheeks.
- In children, a temperature of over 37.5°C is considered a fever.
- Children with viral illnesses often have a fever as it helps the body to fight the virus.
- A high temperature can be quite worrying, but most children recover with no problems within a few days.

What you can do to help:

- Encourage them to drink plenty of fluids even if they are not thirsty.
- You could help to your child to stay at a comfortable temperature by covering them with a lightweight sheet or opening a window, but they should be appropriately dressed for their surroundings.
- If a fever is making your child uncomfortable, you can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen as directed on the medicine packaging.

Ear ache

- A baby or toddler may pull or rub at an ear.
- The ear can be red and there might be discharge.
- Other possible symptoms include irritability, crying, difficulty feeding and restlessness at night.
- Most ear ache is caused by viruses and will get better by itself within about 3 days.
- Your child may have a problem hearing for up to 2 to 6 weeks.

What you can do to help:

- If your child has ear ache, you can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen as directed on the medicine packaging.
- Placing a warm flannel against the affected ear may also help relieve the pain.

Tiredness and aching

- Your child might feel quite tired as the body is looking after itself by resting, so its defence system can fight the illness.
- Children may have some pain or discomfort when they have a viral illness, such as a headache or achy limbs.
- It is not usually a sign of anything serious.

What you can do to help:

- Encourage them to drink plenty of fluids even if they are not thirsty.
- You could help to your child to stay at a comfortable temperature by covering them with a lightweight sheet or opening a window, but they should be appropriately dressed for their surroundings.
- Make sure your child gets plenty of rest.
- You can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen as directed on the medicine packaging.

Vomiting

- Vomiting is a common symptom of many normal childhood illnesses and get better within a few days.
- It is very unlikely that your child will choke.
- Viral illnesses often cause young children to 'gag' (especially at night) and this can make them vomit.
- Vomiting may also be caused by an infection in the gut and usually your child will also have diarrhoea.

What you can do to help:

- Drinking is the most important thing. Encourage your child to drink little and often, even if it feels like the fluid is not staying down.
- Seek medical advice if you are concerned your child is becoming dehydrated or if vomiting is not improving after two days.

Information:

NHS (www.nhs.uk/) / Caring for children with coughs (www.child-cough.bristol.ac.uk/)