

Sinusitis

The sinuses are four sets of hollow spaces that are located in the cheekbones, the forehead, behind the nasal passages, and deep in the brain. Sinuses are lined with the same mucous membranes that line the nose and mouth.

When someone has a cold or allergies and the nasal passages become swollen and make more mucus, so do the sinus tissues. The drainage system for the sinuses can get blocked, and mucus can become trapped in the sinuses. Bacteria, viruses, and fungi can grow there and lead to sinusitis.

Symptoms

- Cold symptoms – nasal discharge, cough -- **lasting more than 10 days without improving**
- Thick yellow nasal discharge and a fever **for at least 3-4 days in a row**
- A severe headache behind or around the eyes that gets worse when bending over
- Persistent bad breath, along with cold symptoms
- Many parents mistake cold-related headaches in young kids for sinus infections. But the sinuses in the forehead don't start developing until kids are 6 or 7 years old; they therefore can't get infected until the early teen years. So, headaches in kids who have colds usually **are not** sinus infections
- In older kids and teens, the most frequent symptoms of sinusitis are a daytime dry cough that doesn't improve after the first 7 days of cold symptoms, fever, worsening congestion, dental pain, ear pain, or tenderness in the face. Sometimes teens who have sinusitis also develop upset stomachs, nausea, headaches, and pain behind the eyes

Many parents mistake symptoms of a common cold with sinusitis. Generally, viral colds have the following characteristics:

- Colds usually last 5-10 days
- Colds typically start with clear, watery discharge. After a day or 2, it is normal for the discharge to become **thicker and white, yellow, or green**. After several days the discharge becomes clear again and dries up.
- Colds include a daytime cough that becomes worse at night
- If fever is present, it is usually at the beginning of the cold and is generally low grade, lasting 1-2 days
- Cold symptoms peak in severity at 3 or 5 days, then improve and disappear over the next 7-10 days

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Prevention

Simple changes in your lifestyle or home environment can help lower the risk of sinusitis. For example, during the winter, when the cold air outside and your heating system make the air inside your home abnormally dry, consider using a humidifier to keep home humidity at 45%-50%. This will stop dry air from irritating the sinuses and make them less of a target for infection. It's important to clean your humidifier regularly to prevent mold growth.

Although sinusitis itself is not contagious, it is often preceded by a cold, which can spread easily, particularly among family or friends. The most effective way to prevent germs from spreading is to teach kids the importance of frequent hand washing, particularly when they're sick.

Treatment

Doctors may prescribe oral antibiotics to treat cases of sinusitis that are believed to be caused by bacteria. Some doctors may recommend decongestants and antihistamines to help reduce the symptoms. Cases of sinusitis caused by viruses usually go away on their own without medical treatment.

Acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and/or warm compresses can help reduce any pain. But over-the-counter cold preparations have not been found to be effective in reducing symptoms in kids and may cause unwanted side effects.

Call the doctor whenever your child has:

- a cold that lasts for more than 10 days without improvement
- a cold that seems to be getting worse after 7 days of symptoms
- symptoms of allergies that don't clear with the usual allergy medication

Also call the doctor if your child shows any other signs of sinusitis, like pain or stiffness in the cheeks, a fever, or a cold that seems worse than usual.

Adapted from www.kidshealth.org and www.healthychildren.org