



Dear Parents/Guardians

We hope you have started 2023 in good spirits. We're contacting all our patients who might be looking after children to update them on managing coughs and colds and how to access health care at this time of unprecedented challenge to the NHS. Just before Christmas there was a huge surge in respiratory infections that had an impact on primary care availability for our patients and demand on the hospital system. Thankfully the viral surge has quietened down a bit, but we do anticipate another rise in respiratory and COVID infections in the near future. In preparation for this we are keen to help you know when you need to seek help for you and your family and equally when you can relax about symptoms that are not medically concerning.

Viral illnesses are incredibly common, especially in children, who will get 6 to 8 viral infections every year. The more children in a household the more infections they will get. They might bounce from one infection to the next without a break. This often makes parents concerned that their child might have an immune deficiency but in reality, all the coughs and colds are a vital part of your child developing a robust immune system.

The cough from a viral illness typically lasts 25 days – more than 3 weeks! The cough typically occurs because mucus “snot” trickles down the back of the throat. The cough is a normal response to this to help clear the throat and protect the lungs from snot dripping down into them.

If children 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. Sometimes with back-to-back infections coughs can persist for months at a time.

Noisy, chesty coughs are still often caused by viruses. They can sound awful but if your child is otherwise well and breathing normally there is rarely any cause for concern.

Whilst ongoing coughs are common in children it is important to note that new or changed coughs lasting more than 3 weeks in adults over 40, especially if they are or have been smokers, require further investigation with a chest x-ray.

Other common symptoms of viral illness are:

- Runny nose (typically lasts 15 days)
- Sore throat (lasts 2-7 days). Antibiotics generally do not affect the duration of sore throats and they get better whether viral or bacterial without treatment in most cases but do consult your pharmacists or doctor as sometimes antibiotics are recommended
- Earache (lasts 7-8 days) this is due to fluid in the middle ear and may end up with discharge from the ear if the drum bursts. If associated with high fever or pain that cannot be controlled with paracetamol and brufen do seek help from your GP.

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, they will not help the cough get better faster.

The key things to look out for as a parent are signs of more serious illness. Symptoms of serious illness include:

1. Being unrousable or having an excessively sleepy child or one that is confused – these are really high-risk signs and should prompt you to go directly to A&E or call an ambulance
2. Being short of breath (as if your child has been running) or is 'working hard' to breath when your child is resting.
3. The skin between the ribs or below the ribs getting sucked in each time your child takes a breath.
4. If your child appears much paler than usual with hands and feet that are cold while their body is warm. If their skin, lips or tongue appear blue, go directly to A&E or call an ambulance
5. High fever:
 - a. Under 3 months: Temperature of 38°C or more.
 - b. 3 – 6 months: Temperature of 39°C or more.
 - c. Child over 6 months who has a temperature (over 37.8°C for more than 5 days)
6. Not eating or drinking for more than 12 hours
7. Not passed urine for more than 12 hours
8. Scarlet fever rash – a red rash that has a sandpaper like feel to it

This information is based on the excellent website: <http://child-cough.bristol.ac.uk/>

This website is well worth a look at directly as there is far more advice within this website than that provided in this message.

We hope this information helps you get through the Spring with confidence in how to better manage your children's wellbeing.

FRIARY HOUSE SURGERY