

### Viral illnesses

A virus is a germ that causes infections, such as the common cold, bronchiolitis, tonsillitis, ear infections, influenza, mumps and chickenpox. There are hundreds of different viruses.

It is common for children to have up to 12 viral illnesses per year in the first few years of life. It is also common for children to get sick from one virus shortly after getting better from a different one, so it can seem they are sick all the time. As children get older, the frequency of catching viral illnesses usually reduces.

Viruses can easily spread when children have close contact with each other. Most viruses are mild, and the best treatment is rest at home.

### Signs and symptoms of viruses

If your child has a virus, they may show a variety of symptoms, including:

- a blocked or runny nose
- a sore throat and fever
- coughing or sneezing
- wanting to sleep more (lethargy)
- red, watery eyes
- rashes that turn white
- vomiting and/or diarrhea
- **not wanting to eat and feeling generally unwell.**

### Care at home

**Viruses cannot be treated with antibiotics. The best treatment is rest at home to allow your child's immune system to fight the virus.**

Here are some simple measures that can make your child more comfortable:

- Give your child small amounts to drink frequently when awake, such as a mouthful of water every 15 minutes or so. This helps to ease a sore throat by keeping it moist, and replaces the fluid lost due to having a fever, vomiting or diarrhea. Water is best, but rehydrating icy poles are also a good way of providing fluids to your child.
- Do not be concerned if your child does not eat for a few days. When they feel better they will start eating again.
- Allow your child to rest.
- Give your child paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain, or if your child is miserable, irritable or lethargic.
- Do not use paracetamol or ibuprofen just to reduce fever. Fever helps the body get better naturally.

### How are viral illnesses spread?

A virus can spread from person to person in tiny droplets from the nose (sneezing or a runny nose) and mouth (saliva or a cough). Viruses can also spread via vomit or faeces

(poo), especially when someone has diarrhea.

There is usually a delay between when a child is exposed to the virus and when they develop the illness. This delay is generally a few days, but some viruses may take up to two or three weeks before symptoms appear.

Good hygiene reduces the chance of getting viruses or passing them onto others. Good hygiene includes:

- regularly washing hands thoroughly
- not sharing cups or cutlery
- encouraging children to cough or sneeze into their elbow

using tissues instead of hankies – teach your child to throw tissues into the bin as soon as they have used them and to wash their hands afterwards.