

Your Questions About Colds, Germs and Getting Sick...



How do we get sick, like when we catch a cold?

Your body has an army of fighters called your immune system. This system protects you from germs such as bacteria and viruses. If a germ is able to sneak past the immune system, then you can get sick. There is a special barrier that protects your entire body from these germs; this is your SKIN. There are also places where germs can get inside your body, as there is no skin there. Can you think of any? These places are your mouth, your nose and your eyes. They contain mucous membranes which is why they feel wet.



How do we prevent from getting sick?

The BEST way to prevent from getting sick is to WASH YOUR HANDS very often. Even if they appear clean, you may still carry germs on them. These germs can then get inside your body when you rub your nose or put your fingers in your mouth. You may think you didn't put your fingers in your mouth, but when you eat with your hands, the germs stick to the food then go into your mouth!

What is a cold? How come I don't feel well? And why do I get a stuffy nose

A virus that attaches itself to the mucous membranes in your mouth, eyes or nose usually causes a cold. Once inside, it creates an infection, which is why you don't feel well. When you have a cold, you may have a stuffy nose. This is because the germs are making the soft wet tissue inside your nose red and swollen; your nose will therefore be "running" (lots of clear liquid leaking). You may also feel like you have a sore throat; the germs are doing the same thing in your throat as in your nose. Sometimes, but not often, you may have a small fever; this is because your body is trying to kill the germs.

What should I do when I get sick?

As long as you don't have a fever, you can still go to school, but it depends on what your parents think is best for you. It is important that you cough or sneeze inside your elbow, not in your hands, and that you throw your tissues in the garbage right away. After that, ALWAYS wash your hands or you may make other people sick too. Be careful when using medications for colds as they can cause unwanted effects. Remember that these medications will not make the cold go away faster, it will only relieve your symptoms.

Here are a few tricks to make you feel better:

- Drink lots of liquids (hot liquids, like tea with lemon and honey, will help to soothe you)
- Take a hot bath, the steam will help unclog your nose
- Put cream or Vaseline around your nose to keep it from cracking
- Go outside for a walk: the cool air helps you breathe better
- Keep your bedroom (and rest of the house) cool, at about 20° Celsius, because the heat dries your nose more
- Get lots of rest so your immune system has enough energy to fight off those germs (ex: go to bed a bit earlier)



Does the cold weather cause you to get sick?

Although we often hear this, there is no scientific proof that it does. When it starts getting cold outside, we usually turn on the heating. This causes your mucous membranes to dry up and to get infected from germs around you. Also, since it is cold, we forget to open up the windows in the house to get clean air in and germs out. Your mom is probably right; you must bundle up when you go out. The cold could possibly lower your immune system and make you more likely to get sick from germs that you caught somewhere else. However, *the cold weather itself will not get you sick.*



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