



35 Queens Parade, Clifton Hill VIC 3068 | P. 03 9088 3258 | F. 03 9088 3257

admin@thecranegp.com.au | www.thecranegp.com.au |   @thecranegp

Patient information – Viral illnesses in children

Most viral illnesses in children improve with time, plenty of rest, fluids, and supportive care. Antibiotics do not work against viruses.

Caring for your child at home

Hydration

Children can lose fluids quickly when unwell, especially with fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, or poor appetite. Keeping fluids up is one of the most important treatments.

- Feed your child smaller amounts, more often.
- Clear fluids are great for helping rehydrate, as the body absorbs them faster. They also taste better to most sick children. However, if your child is drinking other fluids like milk, keep giving it to them.
- The best clear fluids for most children with dehydration are water, apple juice mixed with water and oral rehydration solutions – either liquids or icy poles. Oral rehydration solutions give the body fluids and salts; you can buy them at supermarkets and pharmacies. They are the best for treating dehydration, but children often do not like their salty taste.
- If your child is only drinking water, you should also encourage them to eat simple foods like fruit or dry crackers. This will give them more energy.

A well-hydrated child should pass urine regularly that is pale yellow or straw coloured. A well-hydrated baby should continue to have good number of wet nappies, to similar to when they are well.

Fever

Fever is common with viral illnesses and does not always need treatment.

Treat fever if your child:

- Is uncomfortable or miserable
- Has pain (e.g. sore throat, headache)

Paracetamol or ibuprofen may help when used as directed.

Do not give your child aspirin.

Always check medication labels carefully and avoid giving multiple products containing paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Runny Nose & Congestion

A blocked or runny nose can cause postnasal drip and worsen cough, especially at night.

Helpful measures:

- Saline nasal spray or irrigation
- Gentle suction in younger children
- Keeping the head slightly elevated during sleep (if age appropriate)

Sometimes a nasal steroid spray may be recommended by your GP for persistent congestion.

Cough

Coughing helps clear mucus from the lungs and airways. Viral coughs can last several weeks.

Helpful measures:

- Rest and fluids
- Treat underlying asthma if present
- For children older than 12 months:
 - 1–2 teaspoons of honey 30 minutes before bed may help reduce cough. Do NOT give honey to babies under 12 months due to the risk of botulism.

There is little evidence that cough medicines help children.

See your GP if the cough persists longer than 4 weeks.

Appetite & Rest

It is normal for children to eat less when sick. Most children regain their appetite as they recover.

Encourage:

- Plenty of rest
- Quiet activities
- Small frequent drinks and snacks

Your child should start improving within a few days, though full recovery may take a few weeks. A cough can last longer and is usually okay if your child is otherwise improving.

When to Seek Urgent Help

Call 000 Immediately If Your Child:

- Is struggling to breathe or cannot catch their breath
- Looks blue, grey, or very pale
- Is difficult to wake or not responding normally
- Has a rash that does not fade (blanch) when pressed

See a Doctor Promptly If Your Child:

- your child looks pale.
- your child has pain (including headache) that does not get better with paracetamol or ibuprofen.
- your child has ongoing vomiting and diarrhoea.
- your child is not drinking fluids and will not eat an icy pole.
- your child is less than three months old and has a fever (temperature of 38°C or more).
- your child has signs of dehydration, such as urinating (peeing) less than usual, cool hands and feet, sunken eyes and worsening lethargy.
- Your child has persistent fever > 1 week

Reassuring Signs

It is generally reassuring if your child:

- Is drinking fluids
- Is still passing urine regularly

- Has no breathing difficulties
- Has bursts of playfulness or energy between fevers
- Starts improving within 7 days

Helpful resources

[RCH Kids Health Info: Viral illnesses](#)

[RCH Kids Health Info: Dehydration in babies and children](#)

[RCH Kids Health Info: Fever](#)

[RCH Kids Health Info: Cough](#)