



## Using Cough & Cold Medicines in Young Children

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There has been a lot of media attention paid lately to the issue of over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold medicines for children. This has been spurred by concerns from healthcare professionals, consumers, and regulatory agencies about how safe and effective these products are for the age groups specified.

To give a little history, OTC products for children's cold symptoms have been available for quite some time, and questions about appropriate products and dosages date back at least thirty years. There have been almost no scientific studies done to prove the safety and efficacy of these products in children.

In the mid 1970's, a group of physicians made dosing recommendations for children ages 2 and up based on *adult* doses of the same cold and cough medicines. For children under 2, the dose was to be established by his/her healthcare provider.

Many arguments have been made since then that children are not "little adults" and metabolize medicine differently from adults. Also, many experts feel that the common cold presents differently in children than adults, and clinical studies of medications are very much needed.

Additionally, there have been tragic deaths of infants and young children attributed to OTC cough and cold medicines. In most cases, accidental overdosing was thought to be the cause. While the number of deaths (123 in a 37-year reporting period, 1969-2006) may seem low, the FDA cautions that there may be more deaths that have gone unreported to a federal agency such as theirs.

In August of this year, the FDA recommended *against* the use of OTC cough and cold medicines in children under the age of 2, unless specifically instructed to do so by a healthcare provider. By October, many OTC products for infants and children under 2 had been voluntarily withdrawn from the market.

In late October, the FDA issued another statement recommending that OTC cough and cold medicines not be given to children under 6 years of age without further clinical research.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently gave their opinion to the FDA on the use of OTC cough/cold medicines in children under the age of 6. The AAP agreed there is a lack of evidence for the use of these products, the potential for harm due to dosing errors, and a lack of evidence-based dosing guidelines.

Because of these concerns, Suburban Pediatrics, along with other pediatric groups in the CMC-Northeast network agree that over-the-counter cough and cold medicines should not be used in children less than 2 years of age. Additionally, children ages 2 to 6 years can be given single ingredient products that target their most bothersome symptom. Parents and caregivers must carefully read labels to avoid giving multiple doses of the same ingredient. Also, it is very important to use the measuring device that comes with the product.



If you have any OTC cough and cold medicines for infants or children under 2 in your medicine chest at home, please discard them. Those products are no longer on the market.

So, if your child less than 2 years old gets a cold, what do you do to help them feel better? The following are suggestions to ease symptoms while their little bodies clear the cold virus. And remember—the cold is caused by a *virus*, so antibiotics do not help it go away any faster.

If your child is not old enough to blow his/her own nose, then he/she will sneeze out some of the worst secretions. Additionally, you may need to use a nasal bulb suction to remove more mucus. If the mucus won't budge, you may place several saline nose drops in the nose, *wait sixty seconds* (this will seem like forever!), then suction.

Raising the head of the bed 20 to 30 degrees helps your little stuffy head to breathe easier. For a crib, simply roll a blanket or towel and place it *under* the mattress, since a pillow is dangerous for baby.

A cool mist humidifier adds moisture to the air your child breathes while sleeping, easing coughs and keeping mucus slippery. Offering lots of fluids to drink also eases coughs and keeps your child hydrated. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen (6 mos & up) may be given for fever or discomfort.

Chest rub products specifically designed for infants 3 mos and up may help relieve cough and congestion. Please read labels! Products for older children and adults are not suitable for infants as they contain menthol and camphor.

Please always feel free to call us if you have any questions about how to care for your child, with or without a cold. The common cold is truly a common nuisance, and thankfully rarely serious. When your child is sick, we at Suburban Pediatrics share a common goal with you: to restore your child's health to wellness in the safest, most effective way possible.

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