

Did you know. . .

. . .that children can get 6–9 colds a year? Your child’s doctor wants to make sure your child gets the best care for colds and coughs. Most of the time, this will **not** include antibiotics because they do not help colds and coughs. Here’s more information about why antibiotics are not always helpful when your child is sick.

What kinds of germs cause infections and make your child sick?

There are two main kinds of germs that cause most infections: **bacteria** and **viruses**.

When can antibiotics help cure an infection?

Antibiotics **do** work for infections caused by **bacteria** including:

- strep throat
- bacterial ear and sinus infections
- bacterial pneumonia

When are antibiotics **not** effective?

Antibiotics **do not** work for infections caused by **viruses** like:

- colds and coughs, including bronchitis. (Yellow or green mucus in the nose and fluid in the middle ear can both be caused by viruses.)
- sore throats due to colds, the flu, or other viruses.

How can you and your child’s doctor work together to use antibiotics effectively?

Antibiotic Do’s:

- When your child is sick, ask the doctor if the illness is caused by a virus or bacteria.
- Remember, antibiotics can help cure bacterial infections, but don’t work for infections caused by viruses.
- Share any concerns or questions you have about antibiotics with your child’s doctor.
- Make sure your child takes **all** of the antibiotics prescribed by the doctor, even if he or she is feeling better.

Antibiotic Don’ts:

- Do not expect an antibiotic prescription if your child has a viral infection like a cold or the flu.
- Do not ask your doctor to prescribe antibiotics over the phone.
- **Never** give your child antibiotics prescribed for someone else.



Antibiotics cannot make your child’s pain or symptoms better right away. Ask your doctor about ways to make your child feel better until the antibiotics start to work.

What is antibiotic resistance?

Each time we take antibiotics, some bacteria are killed. But some learn how to defend themselves against antibiotics. These bacteria are called “resistant.” If your child takes antibiotics when they are not needed, your child and others in your community are more likely to get infected with these resistant bacteria. Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem in Massachusetts and throughout the country.

What can you do to protect your child from antibiotic-resistant bacteria?

The best way to minimize antibiotic resistance is to use antibiotics **only** when your doctor says your child has an infection caused by bacteria.

What can you do to keep your child from getting sick with a cold, sore throat, runny nose, or cough?

The best way not to get sick is to avoid exposure to germs. **Handwashing** with warm soap and water is one of the most important ways to keep infections from spreading. You can also:

- teach your child to cover the mouth and nose when coughing.
- have your child use tissues that can be thrown away.
- wash toys that have been put in the mouth in hot soapy water.