SORE THROAT
in Children

Pediatric & Neonatology Department

When should I call the doctor about my child's sore throat?

Sore throat is a common problem in children. It usually gets better on its own. But sore throat can sometimes be serious.

Call your child's doctor or nurse if your child has a sore throat and:
- ✓ Has a fever of at least 101°F or 38.4°C.
- ✓ Doesn't want to eat or drink anything.

Call for an ambulance or take your child to the emergency department if your child:
- ✓ Has trouble breathing or swallowing.
- ✓ Is drooling much more than usual.
- ✓ Has a stiff or swollen neck.

What causes sore throat?

Sore throat is usually caused by an infection. Two types of germs can cause the infection: viruses and bacteria. Children spread germs easily because they often touch each other, share toys, and put things in their mouths.

Children who have a sore throat caused by a virus do not usually need to see a doctor or nurse. Children who have a sore throat caused by bacteria might need to see a doctor or nurse. They might have a type of bacterial infection called "strep throat."

How can I tell if my child's sore throat is caused by a virus or strep throat?

It is hard to tell the difference. But there are some clues to look for. With strep throat, white patches can appear on the tonsils (in the back of the throat). You might also see red spots on the roof of the mouth or a swollen uvula.

People who have a sore throat caused by a virus usually have other symptoms, too. These can include:

- A runny nose
- A stuffed-up chest
- Itchy or red eyes
- Cough
- A raspy (hoarse) voice
- Pain in the roof of the mouth

People who have strep throat do not usually have a cough, runny nose, or itchy or red eyes.

If you think your child might have strep throat, call your child's doctor. They can do a test to check for the bacteria that cause strep throat.

Does my child need antibiotics?
If the sore throat is caused by a virus, your child does not need antibiotics. Unless your child has strep throat, antibiotics will not help.

What can I do to help my child feel better?

There are several ways to help relieve a sore throat:

Soothing foods and drinks
Give your child things that are easy to swallow, like tea or soup, or popsicles to suck on. Your child might not feel like eating or drinking, but it's important that they get enough liquids. Offer different warm and cold drinks for your child to try.

Medicines

Acetaminophen/paracetamol or ibuprofen can help with throat pain. The correct dose depends on your child's weight, so ask your child's doctor how much to give.

Do not give aspirin or medicines that contain aspirin to children younger than 18 years. In children, aspirin can cause a serious problem called Reye syndrome. Do not give children throat sprays or cough drops, either. Throat sprays and cough drops contain medicine, but they are no better at relieving throat pain than hard candies. Plus, in some cases, they can cause an allergic reaction or other side effects.

Add moisture to the air

You can use a cool mist humidifier to keep the air from getting too dry. If you don't have a humidifier, you can sit with your child in a closed bathroom with a warm shower running a few times a day.

Avoid smoke

Do not smoke around your child or let others smoke near them. Being around smoke can irritate the throat. Plus, it's dangerous to the child's health.

Other treatments

For children who are older than 4 to 5 years, sucking on hard candies or a lollipop might help.

For children older than 6 to 8 years, gargling with warm salt water might help.

When can my child go back to school?

If your child's sore throat is caused by a virus, they should be able to go back to school as soon as they feel better. If your child has a fever, they should stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever has gone away.

What problems should I watch for?

Call your child's doctor or nurse for advice if:

- Your child is not getting enough to eat or drink.
- Your child still has symptoms after finishing antibiotics, if they were prescribed them

How can I keep my child from getting a sore throat again?

Wash your child's hands often with soap and water. It is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infection. You can use an alcohol rub instead, but make sure the hand rub gets everywhere on your child's hands.

Try to teach your child about other ways to avoid spreading germs, such as not touching their face after being around a sick person.

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