



Education

Sinus Infection

What is a sinus infection?

A sinus infection is a bacterial infection of one of the sinuses that normally drain into the nose. Congestion in a sinus commonly occurs when one of the sinus openings becomes blocked from a cold or hay fever. Sinus congestion usually goes away on its own without becoming an infection. If bacteria multiply within the sinus, a sinus infection can occur. The main symptom is facial pain. Other symptoms of a sinus infection are:

- swelling of the skin over the sinus
- fever that begins 3 or more days after your child gets a cold
- yellow/green nasal discharge lasting more than 14 days.

Swallowing sinus secretions is normal and harmless but may lead to some nausea. Most sinus infections can be diagnosed without doing sinus x-rays.

How can I take care of my child?

The following treatment should reduce pain and fever within 48 hours or less.

- **Antibiotics** Your child's antibiotic is _____. Your child's dose is _____, given _____ times a day by mouth during waking hours for _____ days. This medicine will kill bacteria that are causing the sinus infection. Try not to forget any of the doses. If your child goes to school or to a baby sitter, arrange for someone to give the afternoon dose. If the medicine is a liquid, use a measuring spoon to make sure that you give the right amount. Even though your child will feel better in a few days, give the antibiotic until the bottle is empty to prevent the infection from flaring up again. Do not save the antibiotic for the next illness because it loses its strength.
- **Nasal washes** Use warm water or saline nosedrops followed by suction or nose blowing to wash dried mucus or pus out of the nose. Do nasal washes at least 4 times a day or whenever your child can't breathe through the nose. If the air in your home is dry, run a humidifier.
- **Decongestant nosedrops or spray** To drain the sinuses, use a generic, long-acting decongestant nosedrop or spray (such as oxymetazoline). You don't need a prescription for the nosedrops or spray. The usual dose for adolescents is 2 drops or sprays per nostril twice a day. For younger children use 1 drop or spray a day. Use the medicine routinely for the first 2 or 3 days of treatment. After that, don't use the spray or nosedrops unless the sinus congestion or pain comes back.
- **Pain-relief medicines** Your child can take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) for a few days for sinus pain or any fever over 102°F (39°C).
- **Oral antihistamines** If your child also has hay fever, he or she should take allergy medicine (antihistamine). Otherwise avoid using antihistamines because they can slow down the movement of secretions out of the sinuses.
- **Contagiousness** Sinus infections are not contagious. Your child can return to school or day care when he or she is feeling better and the fever is gone.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Redness or swelling occurs on the cheek, eyelid, or forehead.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- The fever or pain is not gone 48 hours after your child starts taking the antibiotic.
- You have other questions or concerns.

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