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Childcare and Children's Health

AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS

Illness in Childcare – the Common Cold

The common cold is caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat and sinuses. Most colds seem to occur during the winter season. Young children can have 8-10 colds each year. There is no need to keep your child at home with a common cold, unless your child is feeling miserable and needs constant comfort. If your child feels well enough, they can continue their normal daily activities, including playing outside. However, while your child has a cold, ensure they have plenty of rest and sleep.

Preventing colds: What parents can do

- Hand washing is the most important way to reduce the spread of colds. Wash your hands after:
  - coughing, sneezing or wiping your nose
  - being in direct contact with someone who has a respiratory infection
  - wiping your child's nose; wash your child's hands too.
- Teach your child to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they sneeze or cough and to immediately throw the tissue away into a closed bin.
- Make sure your child has received all of the recommended immunisations. While they won't prevent colds, they may help prevent some of the complications, such as bacterial infections of the ears or lungs.
- Try to prevent your child sharing toys with children who have a cold, particularly if your child likes to place things in his/her mouth.
- If possible, keep babies under three months old away from people with colds.

Is it just a cold?

- A cold is not the flu; typical symptoms of a cold may include a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, coughing and a mild sore throat.
- Some children may not want to eat, have a headache or be more tired than usual.
- Colds can sometimes cause fever but the fever usually isn't very high (under 38.5°C).
- Colds usually last about a week but can last for as long as two weeks.

Or could it be something more serious?

- Some respiratory viruses that cause colds in older children and adults may cause more serious illness when they infect infants and toddlers.
- A harsh barking cough, hoarseness, wheezing, or any difficulty breathing may indicate a more serious illness.
- The influenza (flu) virus causes high fever, cough and body aches, strikes more quickly than a cold, and causes infected persons to feel very ill. While children with colds usually have energy to play and keep up their daily routines, children with the flu are likely to want to stay in bed.

If you are at all concerned about your child's health, seek medical advice.

This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded from the Early Childhood Connections website www.ecconnections.com.au

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