

What does my child's sneeze mean?

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(Medical Xpress) -- Though much of the beauty of spring is its vivid colors, rosy-red eyes and noses aren't usually considered a welcome part of the landscape. Runny noses, sneezing and coughing often trumpet spring's return, but many parents wonder does my child have a cold or is it allergies?

"It's easy to get allergies and colds confused because they have several of the same symptoms," said Hannah Chow, MD, pediatrician at Loyola University Health System.

According to Chow, one of the easiest ways to tell the difference is to check whether your child has a fever.

"If your child has a fever, he or she has a virus. Fevers never occur with allergies," Chow said.

Both can cause a runny nose, stuffiness and congestion, which may produce postnasal drip and lead to coughing. Still, there are several differences, including:

Allergies: Look for runny, itchy eyes and nose. Eyes are often red from irritation. Cough may be present but not prominent.

Cold: Though some viruses may cause runny noses and eye redness, these symptoms aren't the result of itchiness. The virus may cause a fever, but never itchy eyes or noses. Coughing is prominent, whereas with allergies, coughing is possible but not always present. Also, colds are contagious and allergies are not.

"Though some of the symptoms are the same, the treatments are different," Chow said.

Allergies:

According to Chow, the best way to avoid an allergic reaction is to avoid the allergen. If it's an environmental allergy, try to limit exposure when the allergen levels are high.

"Obviously, we don't want kids to only stay indoors, but try to minimize exposure to the allergen. Also, rinse out a child's eyes and nose when they come inside to remove possible allergen particles. Showering will help get the allergen off the rest of the body," Chow said.

If your child is exposed to the allergens and has a reaction, antihistamines should bring some relief from the symptoms. If antihistamines don't control symptoms or your child has a food allergy, she suggests seeing a pediatric allergist and asking about [allergy](#) testing.

Colds:

"The only cure for a cold is time. A cold is a virus that can't be treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics will help in no way, shape or form and will not reduce the length of the illness. It just has to run its 5-12 day course. Lots of liquids and lots of rest is the best way to treat a cold," Chow said.

Over-the-counter medications should be used sparingly and only if the [child](#) is over the age of 4. According to Chow, these medications may help treat symptoms but will not reduce the duration of the illness. She suggests using saline water for the nose, a humidifier to help with breathing, children's acetaminophen or ibuprofen for achiness and gargling salt water to soothe the throat.

"It's hard when kids are sick. Remember that viruses go away with a tincture of time," Chow said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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