

Viral Syndrome (Viral Infection)

What is viral syndrome?

A viral syndrome is a viral infection that is caused by the virus or viruses that affects the respiratory tract, however, it can also affect any body part.

Doctors use terminology “Viral Syndrome”, when your child’s infection looks like it is caused by a virus. There are at least 900 different kinds of viruses that can infect human beings. Every human being gets infected with at least 200 different kinds of viruses in their lifetime. A child gets affected more frequently because that is how they develop immunity. We cannot say exactly which virus has infected your child in the earlier stages of infection. As more signs show up, we might be able to pinpoint a kind of virus. But most of the time we might not be able to tell you exactly which type of virus has infected your child. As long as the child gets better and recovers, we do not do any testing. If we try to test your child to find out the kind of virus that is affecting your child it might require a lot of blood for labs. Most of these tests take 2 – 4 weeks to get results. However, if your child is not getting better after a reasonable amount of time, we may order some of these tests to find the source of infection or to make sure your child is okay.

Outbreaks of viral syndrome usually begin abruptly. As the disease spreads through communities, the number of cases peak in about 3 weeks and subsides after another 3 or 4 weeks. **The highest incidence is in 2- to 8-year-olds. Schools are an excellent place for transmission of viruses, therefore, families with school-age children have a higher rate of infection than other families, with an average of one-third of the family members infected.**

Most people who contract the disease recover within a week (although they may tire easily for awhile).

How can I catch virus?

- Viruses spread primarily from person to person, especially by coughing and sneezing (via airborne droplets of respiratory fluids).
- Viruses can enter the body through the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, or mouth. After a person has been infected with the virus, symptoms usually appear within 2 to 4 days. The infection is considered contagious for another 3 to 4 days after symptoms appear.
- The greatest risk of infection is in highly populated areas, where people live in crowded conditions, and in schools.
- Isolating people with viral symptoms is not an effective means of disease control because someone whose symptoms are not yet apparent can spread virus.

What are the symptoms of viral syndrome?

- The first symptoms to show up may include the chills, a fever (102 to 105 F), headache, body aches and pains, and feeling tired or weak.
- Other symptoms could include signs of an upper respiratory infection: sore throat, runny nose, congestion, and cough.
- Some infants develop horse cry and barking cough (Croup).
- Cough and fatigue may go on for two weeks or more.

- Viral syndrome could cause a loss of appetite.
- Some children may have abdominal pain, vomiting or diarrhea.
- Not all viral infections are severe. Even in the same family, one child may be very sick while the other has only a mild illness with a stuffed nose and cough.

Is the viral infection contagious?

- Yes. The viral infection is very contagious.
- Viral infection symptoms usually develop 2-3 days (incubation period) after coming in contact with someone else that is sick with the viral infection.
- Sneezing or coughing can spread the viral infection.
- Your child should be kept home from school or daycare while he/she has symptoms. He/she can return when symptoms are gone, his/her fever has been gone for 24 hours, and if he/she feels well.

Complications:

- With an uncomplicated case of the viral syndrome, although you may have a worsening of the symptoms over the first 3-5 days (with persistent fever), once the symptoms begin to improve, they should just continue to slowly get better. If not, call us as soon as possible.
- In children other complications can include secondary bacterial infections, **such as ear infections, sinusitis and pneumonia.**
- Viral syndrome complications (which can either accompany or follow the illness) generally result from bacterial infections in the lower respiratory tract.
- Viral syndrome can also be followed by **secondary viral infections**, including viral pneumonia, bronchiolitis, parotitis and croup.
- More serious complications rarely occur, but do include encephalitis, Guillain-Barre syndrome, myocarditis and/or pericarditis, rhabdomyolysis and arrhythmias.
- Other complications of viral syndrome that affect children are fever-related convulsions (febrile seizures). Newborns recently out of intensive care units are particularly vulnerable.
- Rarely your child may need to be hospitalized if he is having difficulty breathing or is dehydrated.

How is the viral syndrome treated?

The viral syndrome cannot be cured with antibiotics. Treatment is aimed at easing symptoms. Rest will help the body fight infection and ease symptoms.

Fever

- Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol,) can be used to treat fever, headache, aches, pains, and sore throat. Use the right amount of medication based on weight, not age.
- **Do not give children aspirin or medicine with aspirin in it.** It could cause brain or liver damage.

- Your child should drink plenty of fluids, even more if he/she has a fever. Children may enjoy Popsicles, Jell-O, ice cream, or applesauce.
- Your child will probably feel tired. If not, it's okay if he/she plays at home.

Vomiting and Diarrhea

- If your child vomits, stop all food intakes. Give him/her clear liquids slowly, in many small sips. Do not give her plain water or milk at first. Increase fluid, food, and milk products slowly as he/she is able to keep them down.
- Vomiting and diarrhea can cause dehydration (not enough fluids in the body). If your child is dehydrated (sign of dehydration, such as: dry lips, a dry mouth, not urinating in over 8 hours, or small amounts of dark urine) she may need an oral rehydration solution (such as Pedialyte).

Stuffy Nose

- If your infant has a stuffy nose, saline (salt-water) nose drops might help. Drops can be found at the store. Ask the pharmacist for help.
- Use a bulb suction to clear the nose.
- Put 4-6 drops of saline in each nostril.
- Press one nostril closed with your finger. Gently put the compressed (pushed in) bulb into the open nostril.
- Release pressure (let the air back in) on the bulb until the nose is clear.
- Repeat procedure on the other side.

Cough and Congestion

- Put a cool mist vaporizer or humidifier in your child's room. The vaporizer should be cleaned daily.
- Over-the-counter cold medicine might help cough and congestion. It may help your child sleep, too. Treatment could make the cough last longer. So if your child is not coughing excessively, do not use them.
- If a child is coughing excessively, please bring him/her to the office to be checked out.

How long does the viral syndrome last?

- The viral syndrome usually lasts 3-4 days.
- The cough and weakness could last 1-2 weeks. Children do not need to be kept home from school or daycare because of the cough.

How can a viral syndrome be prevented?

- Wash hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom.
- Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.
- Cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze
- Wash toys and other objects and surfaces after someone with the flu (or any other infection) touches them.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor immediately if...

- Your child looks very sick or drowsy.
- Your child have fever more then 105F
- Your child is breathing heavy or abnormally
- Your child has a bad headache, neck pain, back pain, or a stiff neck.
- Your child is sleeping more than usual, especially if she is sleeping through feedings.
- Your child has a rash particularly purple.
- Your child vomits blood or bile (yellow-green fluid) or continues vomiting
- Your child shows signs of dehydration, such as: dry lips, a dry mouth, not urinating in over 8 hours, or small amounts of dark urine.

Call the doctor in 24 hours if...

- You cannot calm your child (unusual crying, overly fussy, other strange changes in behavior).
- Your child has a hard time breathing, swallowing, or taking in fluids.
- Your child pulls on her ears or says that her ears hurt.
- Your child has a fever that lasts more than 3-4 days or higher than 103 F.
- Your child has a deep cough with lots of mucus.
- Your child's symptoms have not gotten better with treatment or he/she has new symptoms.