

The Children's Doctor



Since starting daycare just over 2 months ago, my 18 month old daughter seems to have had a constantly snotty nose and the sniffles. Should I be concerned?"

When children start daycare it is very normal for them to catch every virus that is going around. Over the cooler months, this means a new virus every 1-2 weeks. This is not because daycare centres are unhygienic and does not mean they are not looking after your child. It is simply a reflection of the number of children in a confined space. Children under the age of 3 years have no respect for germs or personal space! They cough all over each other, wipe their nose anywhere, and put all the toys in their mouth. So even if only 1 or 2 children have a virus, it spreads very easily and rapidly around the centre. As children get older, they start to use tissues, turn away or cover their mouth to cough and stop putting things in their mouth so the spread of viruses is somewhat less.

The normal course of a cold is fever over the first 2-3 days associated with a runny nose. The child then develops a cough. The runny nose thickens and may change colour (yellow-green) and the cough then gets worse. The reason the cough gets worse is that the child is swallowing all of that snot! After one week, the child is generally starting to feel better in themselves but the cough and snuffly nose continue for another 1-2 weeks. After 3 weeks, the symptoms have generally resolved but usually children at daycare have developed another virus within that time and the whole cycle starts again!

The best way to prevent the spread of these viruses in daycare centres is to keep your child at home if they are not well. Allow them to rest and recover before returning to daycare.

If you find your child is becoming very unwell with these recurrent viruses, is losing weight or having fevers for more than 2 days, you should see your doctor to ensure that there is no other cause for concern.