

FACTSHEET

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Sore throat

What is a sore throat?

Sore throats are a very common illness in infants and children. They tend to be more common during winter months. An older child will complain of a sore throat but a younger child or infant may refuse to eat or drink or cry during feeding. If you look at the throat it may appear bright red. Sometimes a child with a sore throat can also have a fever (see [Fever](#) fact sheet) and vomiting.

What causes a sore throat with fever?

It is usually caused by infection with viruses and less often bacteria. In younger children (less than two years old), throat infections are usually viral in origin. Children with a viral throat infection will often also have a runny nose, coughing and sometimes a rash. Antibiotics do not help viral infections.

What to do?

Pain relief is important as reducing pain can encourage your child to eat and drink. Give pain relief as below:

- Paracetamol ("Panadol") or Ibuprofen ("Nurofen") using the dose recommended on the bottle.

Your child may find swallowing difficult. Encouraging your child to drink fluids is very important. They may wish to drink smaller amount of fluids and should be offered drinks more often than usual. Warm fluids and soft foods may be easier for your child to swallow.

Throat sprays or throat lozenges are not recommended.

When should you see your local doctor?

- If the sore throat lasts for longer than 48 hours (2 days)
- If your child is drinking poorly for longer than 24 hours (1 day)
- If your child is unwell or has other symptoms described below
- If your child has enlarging tender lumps in the neck
- If your child has great difficulty swallowing
- If your child has a new skin rash or bruising
- If your child has increased snoring when asleep

You need to go to hospital urgently if your child has:

- Excessive or new drooling (dribbling)
- Difficulty breathing
- Stopping breathing when asleep
- Extreme tiredness or drowsiness
- Possibly choked on a foreign object or swallowed a toxic substance
- Stopped drinking and is having fewer than half the usual amount or volume of urine or wet nappies.

Remember:

- Give pain relief as needed.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids.
- Seek medical attention if the symptoms last for more than 48 hours or your child develops other symptoms.