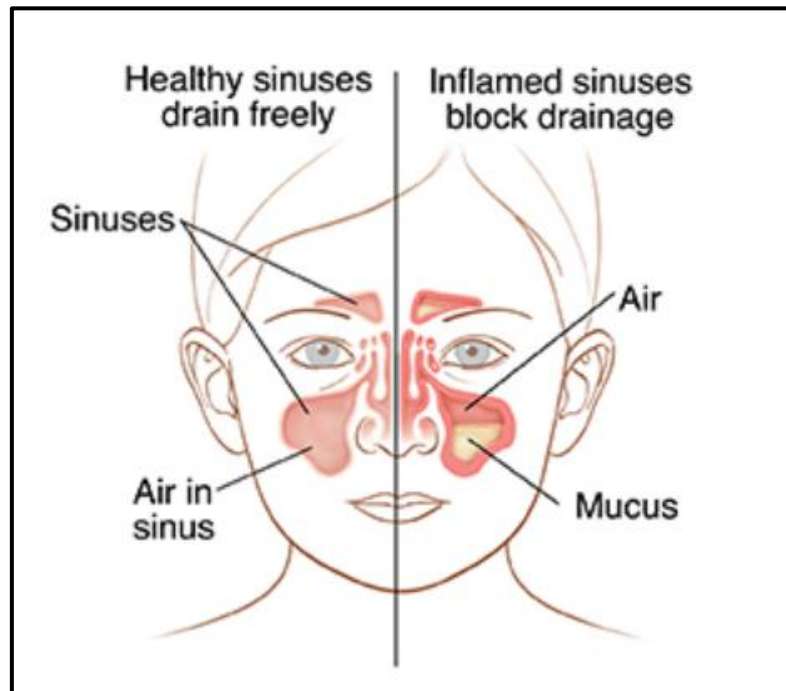


Sinus Infection (sinusitis)

What is a Sinus Infection?

A sinus infection, medically called **acute bacterial sinusitis**, occurs when the sinus cavities (air-filled spaces in the face) become blocked and filled with mucus that can become infected. **The good news:** Sinus infections are **uncommon in children under 7–8 years old**. This is because the **frontal (forehead) and sphenoid (deeper) sinuses**—where most true sinus infections occur—are not fully developed until later childhood. In younger children, symptoms like **runny nose, congestion, and colored mucus** are almost always due to a **common cold (viral infection)**, not a sinus infection. In fact, colored nasal drainage (yellow or green) is often a sign that the body is **fighting and clearing the virus**. In older children and teens, sinus infections can occur, but they are still **uncommon**. Most colds **do NOT turn into sinus infections**. Read below to help determine when symptoms may need further evaluation



<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/>

How to Tell the Difference Between a Cold and a Sinus Infection

What's Normal for a Cold (Upper Respiratory Infection)

- Starts with **clear runny nose, congestion, and dry cough**
- Fever may be present for a few days—or not at all
- Nasal drainage often becomes **yellow or green** as the cold improves
- Cough may become more **wet or “phlegmy”** as mucus drains

These are expected symptoms of a viral illness. **Antibiotics are NOT helpful** and are not recommended. Instead, we focus on **symptom relief** while the illness runs its course.



When It May Be More Than a Cold (Needs Evaluation)

We begin to think about a sinus infection or another complication if your child has:

- **Symptoms lasting more than 10 days WITHOUT improvement**
 - **Worsening symptoms after initial improvement**
 - New or worsening nasal discharge
 - Increased cough
 - New fever
 - **Thick, pus-like nasal discharge with fever lasting 2–3 days**
 - **Severe headache or facial pain**
 - **Swelling around the eyes**
 - **Trouble breathing or signs of dehydration**
-

How to Help Prevent a Sinus Infection

While not all sinus infections can be prevented, the following can help:

- Keep up to date on routine vaccinations (including flu vaccine)
 - Manage allergies if present
 - Children over age 2 may benefit from antihistamines and/or nasal steroid sprays. Check out our [allergy guide](#) (PAA website → Patient resources → Patient handouts)
 - Help clear nasal mucus:
 - **Infants/toddlers:** saline drops or spray + suction
 - **Older children/teens:** nose blowing and saline spray
 - Encourage fluids and rest during illness
 - Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen for comfort as needed
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When Does a Sinus Infection Need Treatment?

Because we follow **evidence-based guidelines**, we are careful about when to use antibiotics:

- Most sinus infections are **viral and improve on their own**
- Only a small percentage become **bacterial and require antibiotics**

Your provider will help decide whether:

- Observation (“watch and wait”) is appropriate
 - OR antibiotics are needed based on symptom pattern and severity
-

When to Call Us

Please contact us if your child has:

- Cold symptoms lasting **more than 10 days without improvement**
- Fever with thick nasal discharge
- Symptoms that **worsen after getting better**
- Severe headache, facial pain, or swelling around the eyes
- Trouble breathing, dehydration, or if you are concerned
- Antibiotics were prescribed, and symptoms are not slowly improving.