

# Some questions your doctor may ask you

It is important to prepare information on your child's cough for your doctor. Here are some questions that your doctor may ask you.

- **What is the cough like?**
  - Is it a dry cough?
  - Is it a wet cough?
- **Does the child produce spit or phlegm?**  
(Children under five years do not spit up phlegm and may swallow it. Small children and babies sometimes vomit it up.)
- **When does the child cough?**
  - At night?
  - Early in the morning?
- **Does the child cough with exertion?**
- **Are there any other breathing symptoms?**
  - Wheeze?
  - Whistling in the chest?
  - Fast breathing?
  - Shortness of breath?
  - Sucking in of the chest

**If in doubt, always see your doctor.**

This brochure has been produced after consultation with the Starship Respiratory Service by the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation of New Zealand (Inc.), 04-499-4592

[www.asthmanz.co.nz](http://www.asthmanz.co.nz)

# Does your child cough?

This brochure contains information on coughing in our kids:

- common coughs
- other symptoms
- information to help you prepare for your doctor's questions.



The Asthma and  
Respiratory Foundation  
of New Zealand (Inc.)  
Te Taumatua Huangō,  
Mate Ha o Aotearoa



Preventable Respiratory Diseases

# Does your child cough?

Coughing is common in children and is usually short-lived. Most children experience some coughing episodes especially when they are pre-school age.



Ten to twenty percent of preschoolers will cough for three weeks or more following a cold. Even children without a cold may cough on average ten times a day but not consistently every day. **A daily cough for greater than six to eight weeks is NOT normal and may be a sign of chest disease.**

It is important to take your child to the doctor if they have:

- a persistent daily cough for longer than six-eight weeks; or
- a cough and other problems, including:
  - working hard with their breathing; or
  - breathing fast; or
  - having a temperature higher than 38.5°C; or
  - not speaking normally or being unable to finish a whole sentence because of their coughing or breathing; or
  - wheezing or whistling in their chest; or
- a cough and you are worried that something is wrong.

# Different types of cough:

A cough is usually wet or dry. A wet cough sounds 'chesty' and phlegmy. A dry cough is less likely to produce phlegm (mucus) and sounds irritated or hacking.

## Common causes of different types of cough:

- 1 Colds or upper respiratory tract infections.
- 2 Asthma – an asthma related cough is usually dry and occurs at night, with sport or in the early morning. An asthma cough is usually associated with other symptoms such as wheeze, allergy (eczema or hayfever), or a history of asthma and allergy in the family. If coughing is the ONLY problem the child has it is very unlikely to be due to asthma.
- 3 Smoke exposure – second-hand cigarette smoke commonly causes children to cough even when they are well. Make smokefree zones such as your home and car. Put smokefree stickers up to let everyone know these places are smokefree.
- 4 Chest infections – a wet, chesty cough is likely to be an infection. If it lasts more than 6–8 weeks there may be underlying chest problems and your child should see a doctor.

## Note

*Don't just assume that a wet cough is a "post-nasal drip" or mucus running down the back of the throat from a sinus infection.*