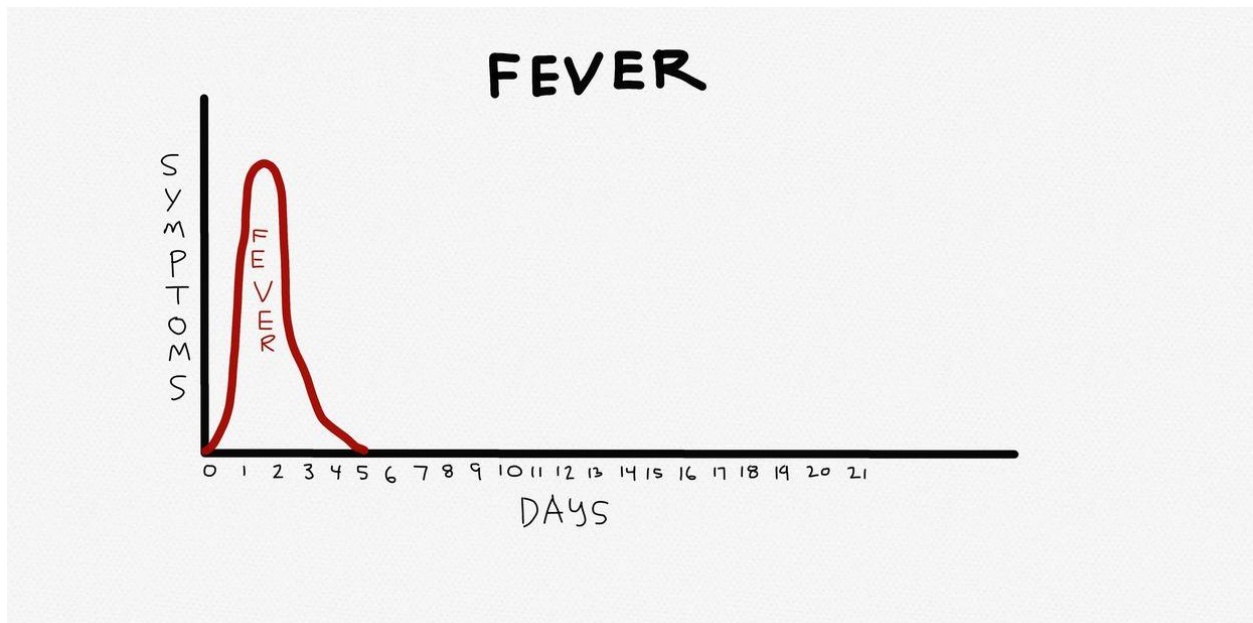


## THE FIVE DAY RULE

### Or: When to Worry About a Cold or Fever

The most common reason we see kids is for colds and fevers. Runny nose, cough, scratchy throat, fever - the typical daycare infection, that's what we're talking about here. Most of these colds and fevers are caused by viruses, and there's no reason to worry about them. So, the big question is how do we know when it may be something worse than a simple cold virus, like a bacterial ear infection, pneumonia or a sinus infection?

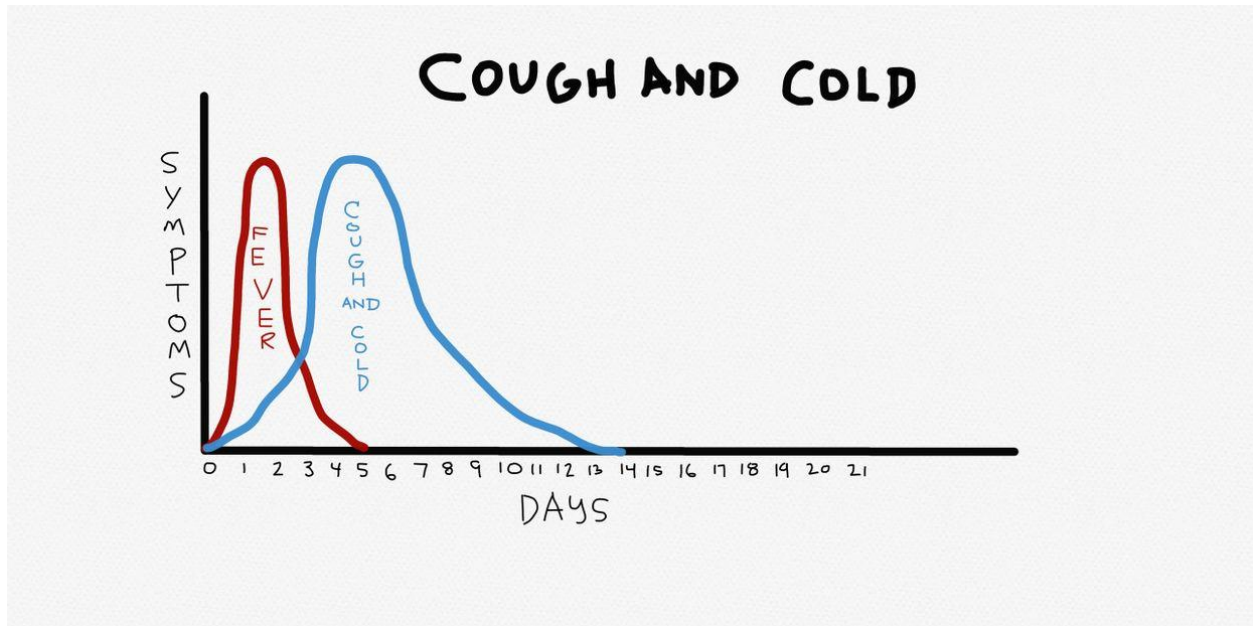
After doing this job for years, I think I've got it pretty much worked out, and I call this rule-of-thumb the 5 Day Rule. Here's how it works:



### *Fever*

If your child gets a simple viral cold, they may get a fever. Often, fever is the first symptom to show up. Usually, a fever caused by a cold lasts no more than 5 days, so the chart of the fever looks like the picture above.

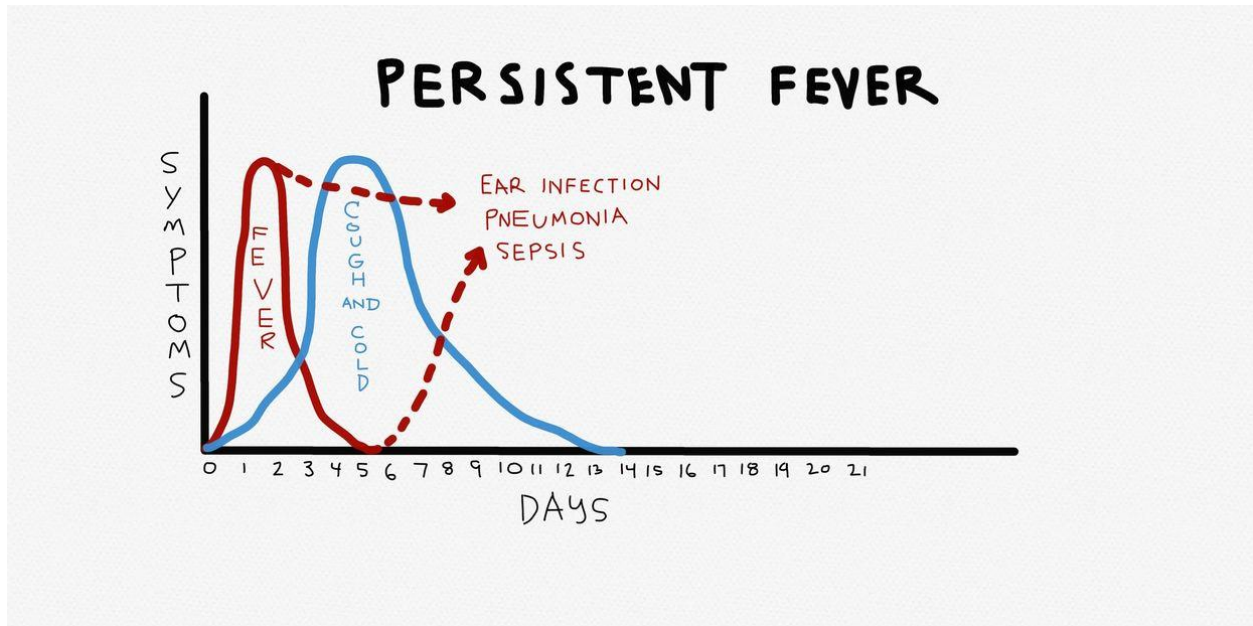
That's the fever showing up on the first day, peaking in 2-3 days, and resolving by day 5 if this is a simple cold.



### *Cough and Cold*

Next, where do the cough, runny nose, scratchy throat and other symptoms come in? If this is a simple viral cold, those symptoms usually show up early as well, peaking around day 5-6 and resolving by 10-14 days (about 2 weeks), like the chart picture. This is the typical pattern of viruses, which don't require any treatment other than support with fluids, cartoons, and lots of hugs.

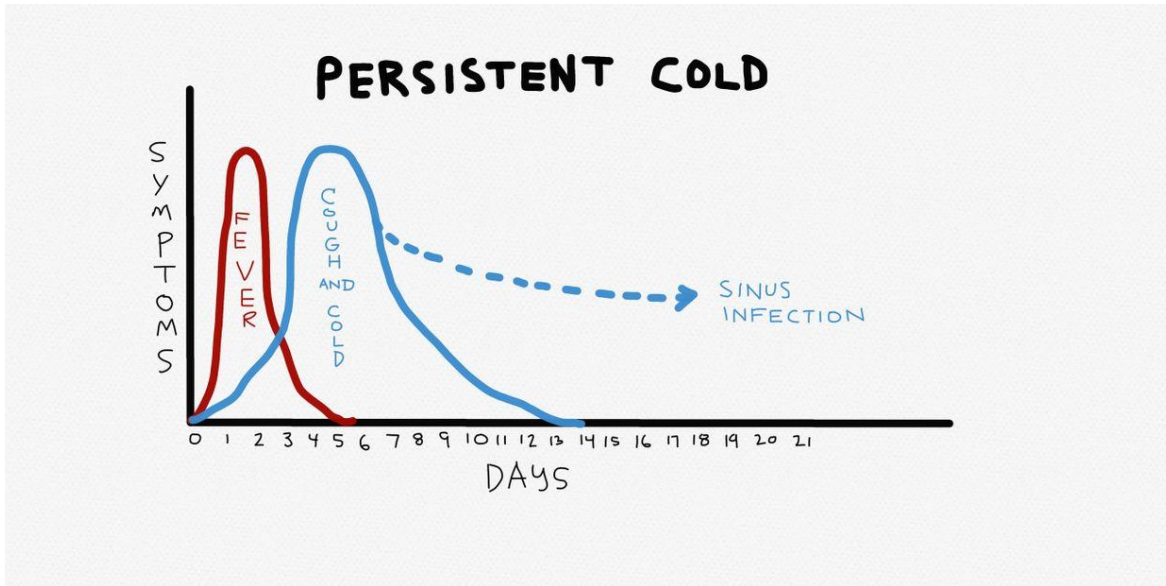
Usually, we see kids around the 5-day mark, as that seems to be when most parents are starting to get nervous since the child recently had fever and they feel the cold has “gone on long enough.” Unfortunately, even for a simple cold, it may take the immune system up to 2 weeks to completely clear out the infection. But in the end, if your child is following this pattern with the fever going away after the first few days and the cold symptoms going away before 2 weeks, everything should be fine.



### *Persistent Fever*

So, what makes us worry? As far as the fever goes, there are two concerning patterns. First, we get concerned if the fever doesn't go away by day 5 (top dashed line in chart). And second, we get concerned if the fever goes away but comes back again (bottom dashed line).

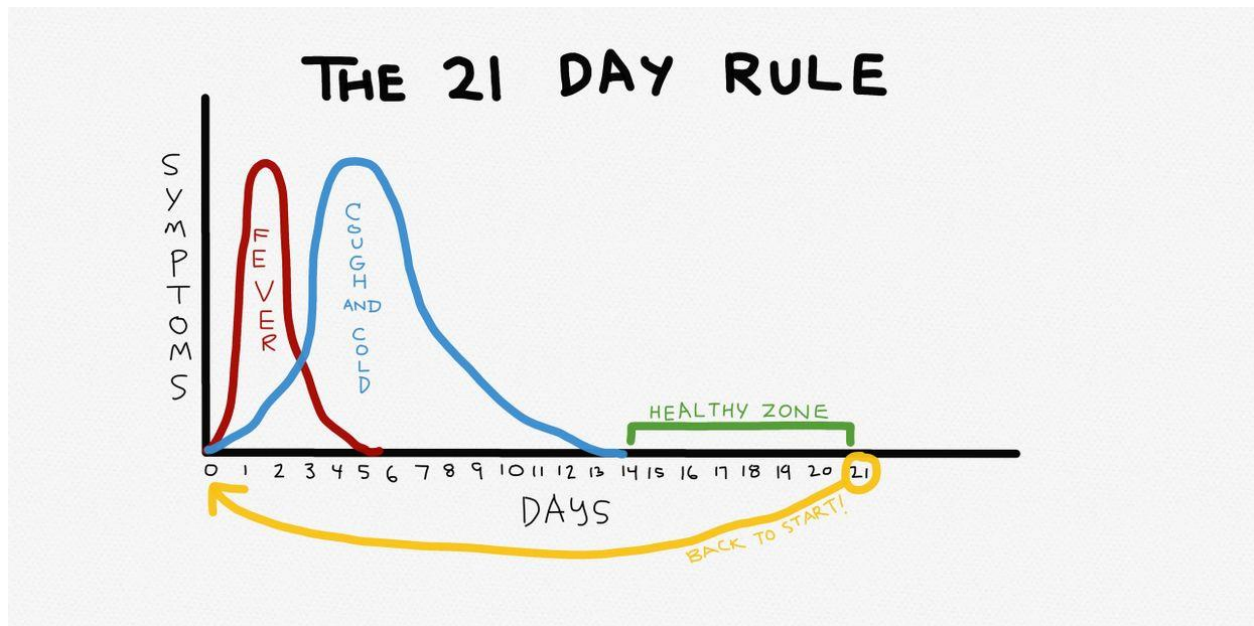
In those cases, we need to consider that this may be something more than a simple cold virus, like an ear, lung or blood infection. This may not be the case, but we do start to lean a little more toward these problems and start to investigate these problems more if the fever lingers or returns.



## Persistent Cold

One other situation gets our attention, and that's if the cold symptoms last longer than 14 days (dashed line in chart). If the cold lasts too long, generally longer than 2 weeks, that's where we start to get concerned that bacteria may have moved in and taken over for the cold virus to keep the party going. This is what we call a bacterial sinus infection.

In this case, a round of antibiotics may be beneficial. But it takes time for kids to develop a real bacterial sinus infection, which is why we prefer to give colds at least 2 weeks to resolve. It helps prevent overuse of antibiotics and saves antibiotics for when they're more likely to be effective.



## The 21 Day Rule

Why does the chart go out to 21 days? Because if your child is new to daycare or school, they will get a brand new cold every 21 days during the winter, on average! Since most colds last up to 14 days, and they get a new cold on average every 21 days, young children new to daycare or school will typically go through a repetitive cycle of 14 “sick” days and 7 “well” days as pictured here.

Of course, these numbers aren’t exact, but they’re darned close. This means that during the winter, it’s not unusual to have at least some cold symptoms 2/3 of the time! That’s how a healthy immune system learns how to fight infections.

## IN SUMMARY

If your new-to-school child gets colds over and over, with short periods of health in between, and gets over the colds without any help from us, that means their immune system is functioning properly! After a few years in daycare or school, that short green healthy zone in the final chart will get longer as they become more and more resistant to simple colds.

Is the 5 Day Rule foolproof? No, and that's why we're always happy to check out your little ones to make sure everything is ok. Remember: you know your child better than anyone, so if you have concerns, we'll want to evaluate your child in person. But in the

end, if your child follows the above pattern, they're probably fine! And keep in mind that the 5 Day Rule is for colds with fever only – if your child has more serious symptoms, like severe ear or throat pain or trouble breathing, then obviously we should see them right away.

Thanks for reading!