

# Nosebleed in children

## Emergency Department factsheets



### What is a nosebleed?

A nosebleed (medically called epistaxis) occurs when small blood vessels in the nose burst and bleed. The inside of the nose is delicate and the blood vessels are close to the surface, making them fragile and easy to burst.

### What causes a nosebleed?

Nosebleeds are common in children and often result from harmless activities such as your child picking their nose, blowing it too hard or getting knocked during play.

The bleeding is usually minimal (even though it may look like a lot of blood when soaked in a tissue or on clothing) and brief (less than ten minutes duration).

There are other causes of a nosebleed.

- Overly sensitive blood vessels which burst and bleed, usually in warm, dry weather.
- Common colds and flu.
- Infections in the nose, throat and sinuses.
- Allergies, such as dust mite allergy or hay fever.
- Blowing the nose too often.
- Child pushing something up their nose, such as a small bead.
- Excessive straining, which can happen with constipation.
- Certain medications, such as anti-inflammatory medicines or nose sprays.

Your child may be distressed and upset by the sight and taste of blood during a nosebleed. They may be frightened that there is something seriously wrong.

It is important that you reassure your child. Tell them they will be fine or that 'everything is okay'. Crying will make the bleeding worse, so it is important to firstly calm and soothe your child.

### First Aid

Once your child is calm, follow these simple First Aid steps.

- Sit your child upright in a comfortable position, slightly leaning forward.
- Squeeze the lower, soft part of the nose with your fingers, a tissue or a cloth (your child can do this if they are older) for ten minutes.
- Apply an 'icepack' or a cool, wet cloth to the bridge (top) of your child's nose and back of the neck.
- Offer your child an 'icypole' or cold drink to cool them down and get rid of the taste of blood.
- Encourage your child to spit out any blood they have in their mouth and not to swallow it.
- Do not keep checking whether the bleeding has stopped by removing your fingers. The blood needs to clot and this takes time. Reading a book or watching television is a good distraction for your child and will keep them from getting bored and restless.
- Have a clock handy so you can be sure ten minutes has gone by.
- After 10 minutes, release the nose and check if the bleeding has stopped (if the nosebleed continues repeat the process for another ten minutes).
- Once the bleeding has stopped, make sure your child does not pick or blow their nose for 24 hours. Your child should not run around or play 'rough' for two hours after the nosebleed, to prevent it from bleeding again.

Your child may vomit after a nosebleed if they have swallowed blood.

## Treatment

All emergency treatment is initially based on the First Aid principles (above). A nurse or doctor will show you how to hold your child's nose to stop the bleeding.

If First Aid fails and the bleeding continues then a doctor will have a look up your child's nose with a special light to see if they can find the bleeding blood vessels.

The doctor may then:

- apply a cream or ointment to the inside of your child's nose (it contains a medicine that slows the blood flow)
- use a chemical to 'freeze' or 'burn' the blood vessel (known as cauterisation) to stop the bleeding
- pack your child's nose with a gauze dressing
- prescribe antibiotics to prevent a bacterial infection.

For severe nosebleeds, your child may need a blood test to check how much blood has been lost. They may also be referred to a specialist ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctor.

If your child's nose has been packed, the gauze should stay in place for 24 to 48 hours. Do not try to remove the packing yourself. After 48 hours, take your child back to the emergency department for a check-up and to have the gauze removed.

If the gauze falls out on its own and the bleeding does not start again, there is no need to go back to the emergency department.

If nasal packing is not needed, then your doctor may ask you to apply an antibiotic ointment to the inside of your child's nose up to four times a day for about a week to clear any infection.

If your child's nose is dry and cracked, you may need to apply petroleum-based gel or ointment (such as Vaseline) inside the nose. Use a cotton tip and gently rub the inside of the nose. This is generally done twice a day for a week. Do not do this in children under four years of age as they are unlikely to sit still and this may lead to injury.

## Care at home

- Your child should rest for at least two hours (quiet activities such as drawing, reading a book or watching television are advised).
- Avoid giving your child hot drinks, hot food or a hot bath/shower for at least 24 hours after a nosebleed.
- Tell your child not pick or blow their nose for 24 hours (a week if they have had their nose cauterized).
- Your child should avoid hard exercise (running/rough play), straining or lifting anything heavy for a week.
- If your child is suffering from constipation, increase their fluid intake (such as water or prune juice) and fibre in their diet (such as fresh or stewed fruit and wholemeal breads/cereals). Ask your doctor or pharmacist about using a stool softener to prevent them from straining.
- A lubricating ointment or nasal spray may help. Ask your doctor, health care professional or pharmacist for advice.

## What to expect

- Most nosebleeds cause only minor discomfort.
- Your child may have several nosebleeds over a few weeks.
- If you are concerned, see your local doctor.
- The bleeding may (rarely) be due to an underlying medical problem.

- Rarely do children lose so much blood that it causes a shortage of red blood cells (anaemia). This is likely with frequent heavy nosebleeds over several weeks.

## Prevention

To prevent nosebleeds in some children, use:

- a humidifier in dry, warm climates
- a lubricating ointment (such as Vaseline) inside the nostrils
- a saline nasal spray (available from pharmacies).

## Seeking help

In a medical emergency, go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).

For other medical problems see your local doctor or health-care professional.

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) provides health information, referral and teletriage services to the public in all parts of Queensland and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for the cost of a local call\*.

\*Calls from mobile phones may be charged at a higher rate. Please check with your telephone service provider

**Disclaimer:** This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.

*The design and general content of this factsheet are reproduced with the permission of the Victorian Minister for Health, from factsheets that are Copyright © the State of Victoria. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.*