



A guide to...

Tonsillitis

Patient Information

Children's Emergency Department (CED)
Watford General Hospital



Caring for your child with Tonsillitis

Your child has been diagnosed with tonsillitis.

We are happy that your child is well enough to be taken home under your supervision.

What are tonsils and tonsillitis?

Tonsils are two small glands that sit on either side of the throat. In younger children, they help to fight germs and act as a barrier to infection. As the immune system develops, the tonsils become less important and usually shrink.

Tonsillitis is simply inflammation of the tonsils. It is usually caused by a viral infection, especially in younger children. Less commonly, a bacterial infection may be the cause. It is very common in children and young people.

Is it contagious?

Tonsillitis itself is not contagious, but the infections that cause it are. These can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes, others can become infected by breathing in contaminated droplets or by touching surfaces or objects that the droplets have landed on, and then touching their face.

Do I have to keep my child off of school?

If your child is well enough to attend school, then they do not have to remain at home.

To prevent spread, encourage them to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze, and wash their hands afterwards. Any used tissues must be placed in a bin.

Normal Symptoms

- Sore throat
- Enlarged and red tonsils—this can cause a change to their voice and difficulty swallowing.
- Fever
- Cough
- Headache
- Earache
- Nausea
- Tiredness
- Painful glands in the neck

RED FLAG (worrying) symptoms

- Noisy breathing
- Difficulty breathing
- Drooling
- Unable to swallow

Return to CED urgently if safe to do so, or call 999 if your child develops any of the red flag symptoms detailed above.

Seek review by GP, 111 if out of normal surgery hours, or CED if:

- Less than half of usual feed amount is being taken
- Significant reduction in urine output
- Development of widespread sandpaper rash or rash that does not disappear when pressure applied over it.
- Large swelling of gland(s) in neck.

Care of your child

Most children can be managed at home under the supervision of their parent / carer.

- Analgesia — simple over the counter medication such as paracetamol and / or ibuprofen are effective when given regularly for pain., if age appropriate and as recommended by your clinician.
- If age appropriate, gargles, lozenges and local anaesthetic throat sprays can be helpful; these are available over the counter—please speak to your local pharmacist for advice.
- Encourage regular and plentiful drinking, small frequent food offerings; ice lollies can be soothing.
- Most cases of tonsillitis are self resolving within a week regardless of whether viral or bacterial cause, and therefore **antibiotics are rarely of benefit**. They can in fact cause your child to feel more unwell. The clinician who has assessed your child will make this decision based on their examination.

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.uk**



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