Common Cold (Upper Respiratory Infection)

1. What is the common cold?
The common cold is a highly contagious viral infection of the upper respiratory tract that increases in prevalence during the fall and winter.

2. What are the signs and symptoms of the common cold?
Symptoms of the common cold often include runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, cough, and headache. Fever is usually slight but can climb to 102 degrees Fahrenheit in infants and young children. While nasal discharge usually is watery and clear at the onset, it can become colored and thick after a few days. This has no correlation with bacterial infections, although occasionally the common cold can lead to ear or sinus infections that require treatment with antibiotics. High fever, significantly swollen glands, severe facial pain in the sinuses, and a cough that produces mucus may indicate a complication or more serious illness requiring a doctor’s attention.

3. Incubation period: From 2 - 14 days

4. Contagious period: Usually few days before signs and symptoms appear and while clear runny nasal secretions are present. Viral shedding is most abundant in the first few days of infection and usually ceases within 7 - 10 days.

5. How does infection with the common cold occur?
The common cold is passed person-to-person through direct or close contact with mouth and nose secretions, including inhalation of tiny droplets containing the virus. Transmission can also happen indirectly when a healthy person touches an object or surface that has been soiled by nasal or oral discharges from the infected person and then touches his or her eyes or nose.

6. How can infection with the common cold be prevented?
General hygiene measures, such as frequent hand washing, covering the mouth and nose with tissues when coughing or sneezing, and proper disposal of tissues are the best methods of prevention. If possible, one should avoid close, prolonged exposure to persons who have colds.

7. Is there a treatment for common cold?
Only the symptoms can be treated, there is no cure or vaccine for the common cold at this time. Children that have a viral infection should not be given aspirin, for they run the risk of developing a rare but serious illness called Reye’s syndrome.

8. Exclusion: Generally none for children with the common cold, unless they meet other exclusion criteria (see “General Exclusion Criteria”)

9. Readmission: Upon recovery, by school principal or principal’s designee.