



# St. Vincent Physician Network

## **My Child is Coughing a Lot What Could it be?**

from [www.kidsgrowth.com](http://www.kidsgrowth.com)

This is the time of the year when coughing seems to be a common symptom in children. Confusingly, a cough could be caused by many different forms of illness. Remember, a cough is usually a reflex to clear the airways of irritating material. Our air passages start with our nose, pass down the throat (trachea), into the major airways (bronchi), through the smaller airways (bronchioles), and finally into the microscopic air sacs (alveoli). Oxygen from the air sacs is then transferred into the blood stream. But, enough of anatomy and physiology! It is sufficient to say that any irritation or infection along this pathway can cause a cough!

Here are just a few of the many causes of cough:

- Sinus drainage/infections. Drainage in the back of the throat, from the sinuses, can cause a "post—nasal drip"; which may lead to a cough.
- Lung/airway infections—such as bronchitis and pneumonia.
- Any non—infectious irritations of the airway—such as inhalation of chemicals, allergens, or irritating substances (cigarette smoke, gasoline, etc.).
- Viral colds—produces mucus secretions in the nose, throat, and upper airways.
- Allergy—leads to mucus production and irritation of some parts of the airways.
- Asthma/wheezing—some children will have occasional airway spasm due to any number of factors (allergy, weather change, and viral infections seem to head the list). This narrowing of the air sacs causes a cough of varying degree.

Remember:

- Cough is a protective reflex, and serves a useful purpose. Parents may not be overly enthusiastic about coughing spells that keep their child awake at night, even if it is "protective"! But it might help parents deal with it a little bit easier knowing that the cough may benefit your child.
- The symptom of cough can be caused by numerous ailments. It is difficult for pediatricians to recommend what medication or measures will truly help the child without checking the child over to determine the exact cause.