

Ways To Keep Your Children Healthy During Cold and Flu Season

By Rona Renner, RN and Marisol Muñoz-Kiehne, PhD

Catching a cold is one of the most common reasons children stay home from school. Colds are caused by viruses that are in the air you breathe, on the toys your children play with, and on most things you touch. The flu is also caused by a virus that lands in your breathing passage, but the symptoms are worse, and may last longer. When a child has a cold they can usually play and do many normal things, but when the flu hits, your child will look sick, be achy and unhappy. Always check with your child's doctor for a diagnosis and for advice on how to treat colds and flu.

You can't stay germ free, but you can reduce the risk of your child getting sick. Here are a few suggestions:

- **WASH YOUR HAND FREQUENTLY!** Teach your children to wash their hands after they go to the bathroom, before they eat, after they blow their nose, and after they've been outside playing or touching a pet. Hand washing is the single most important thing you can do to keep germs from making you sick!

Teach children to wash with warm water and soap. Have them rub their hands together for 10-20 seconds, and making sure to get in between the fingers and under the nails. You may want to come up with a special hand washing song for young children, so they wash until the song is over. Then have them rinse their hands and dry with a towel.

Hand washing is a simple and powerful preventive measure. Set a good example for your kids, and wash often.

- **KEEP YOUR CHILDREN AWAY FROM SMOKE.** Secondhand smoke can make your child more likely to get sick. If you smoke, don't smoke in the house or car. If you want help to stop smoking go to <http://www.californiasmokershelpline.org>
- **CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR** about giving your baby or child a flu shot. The recommendations sometimes change.
- **ENCOURAGE PLENTY OF SLEEP, WATER, AND HEALTHY FOOD.** Getting good nutrition and enough sleep are keys to a strong immune system and good health.
- **EXERCISE, LOVE, AND PLAY** are also vital ingredients to a healthy immune system. When our children are under too much stress, their bodies may rebel and get sick.

Do the best you can to raise your children in a healthy environment, but no matter how hard you try, chances are cold and flu viruses will visit your family this season.

For more information go to the American Academy of Pediatrics at <http://www.aap.org>