

Why Does My Kid Always Seem Sick?

Parents frequently express frustration during the winter cold and flu season about the fact that their children seem sick "all the time". Upper respiratory infections, commonly referred to as "colds" are much more prevalent in winter months for reasons that are not entirely understood. Runny nose, cough, fever and sore throat are typical symptoms. The average "cold" will run its course over 7-10 days, during which time it is not unusual to have yellowish nasal drainage, which subsequently resolves.

While adults average 2-4 colds per year, young children typically experience 8-12 episodes per year, mostly clustered in the winter months. If you take into consideration average number of cold episodes and the fact that it takes about 2 weeks for each cold to run its course, many kids, especially infants and toddlers are in fact "sick" more than they are well during the winter months. While most colds can be managed with rest, fluids and over the counter medications to control fever and congestion, if you feel your child is not improving, is running persistent fevers, or is having difficulty breathing, it is wise to seek medical attention to rule out complications such as ear or sinus infections, which might benefit from treatment with antibiotics.

As children grow older, their colds frequency decrease. Although young children attending daycare centers experience an increased frequency of colds compared with children who stay home, day care attendees have a lower incidence of illness than "stay at home kids" when they begin elementary school, presumably due to the protective effect of the immunity they have developed from prior infections. There is also some evidence that increased exposure to "colds" can lower a child's overall risk of allergies or asthma.

So...the next time you think your child has been sick most of the winter...you are probably right, but as long as they aren't developing any serious complications, maybe it's not such a bad thing after all!

Dr. Kim Coleman, M.D., FAAP

Peditatrician

Medical Director, United Physicians, Inc.

Copyright K Coleman, LLC 2005