

Back to School: Avoiding Colds and Flu

Keep kids healthy with these tips:

Did you know that according to the American Lung Association, most young children get between six and eight colds per year? And that colds and flu are most common during the school year, from September to May?

While you can't prevent every cold, you can help kids stay well this school year. Teach them how to avoid cold and flu germs, make sure their immune systems are in tip-top shape with these hints:

Encourage Hand Washing: Experts say that washing hands often, especially before eating, is the best defense against cold and flu germs. That's because although some cold and flu germs are spread by sneezing and coughing, the most common route of infection starts with germs on the hands that are then spread when the person touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Teach children to wash their hands several times a day with soap and water and to turn off faucets with a paper towel. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are the next best solution.

Don't Share Food or Drink: While this may be tempting to try a friend's drink or take a bit of his or her lunch, it isn't a good idea. Teach kids that food, drinks, straws, and utensils are personal items that are not to be shared. Talk about safe ways to sample foods, such as pouring liquids into another cup or breaking off a piece of a cookie from an area that hasn't been bitten. And be sure to model good habits at home too, such as using a spoon to serve individual portions of dip rather than dipping into a shared container. Likewise, make a no-sharing policy for musical instruments or any toys that come in contact

with the mouth.

Tissue Care: Help kids make a habit of using tissues only once before throwing them away, followed up by hand washing. Warn them not to handle other people's tissues. While handkerchiefs may be a "greener" way to go, they can really harbor germs— if you use them, apply the use-it-once-and-wash-it rule. If a tissue is not available, teach kids to sneeze or cough into their shoulder or the crook of their elbow rather than their hands.

Know the Signs: Runny noses, sneezing, and coughing are all signs of colds and flu that kids can learn to look out for. While it's true that a virus can sometimes be passed along before full-blown symptoms appear, or left behind on a handrail or elevator button by a sick person kids never even see, knowing that they should steer clear of people who are obviously sick is a good rule of thumb.

Build Immunity: In addition to teaching your kids to avoid exposure to cold and flu germs, you can help them stay well by making sure their immune systems are firing on all cylinders. Although experts aren't exactly sure why one person can be exposed to a virus and not catch it while another person does, it is thought that a healthy lifestyle plays a part. Make sure your child: gets plenty of rest—(experts from the Nemours Foundation recommend 10 to 12 hours per night for preschoolers, 10 hours per night for kids between the ages of 6 and 9, 9 hours a night for those between 10 and 12, and 8 to 9.5 hours a night for teens), eats a well-balanced diet, avoids unnecessary stress, and gets regular exercise.

In short, there is no way to guarantee that kids will never catch a cold or flu — and experts say these routine childhood illnesses actually help strengthen the immune system in later years —

but by following these guidelines, you can help them avoid being sick any more than they have to.

Source: everydayhealth.com

Recognizing the Ill Child: Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Daily Health Check

The staff of a child care program or school who are familiar with the behavior and appearance of the enrolled children can easily assess each child's health status both when the child arrives and periodically throughout the day. This assessment involves observing the child, speaking with parents, and, if applicable, talking with the child. Doing the daily health check and keeping symptom records is a good way for child care professionals to monitor trends and watch for signs of an infectious disease emergency or outbreak.

Staff should be instructed to observe, receive information from the child's family, and document the following:

- Changes in behavior or appearance
- Any skin rashes and itchy skin or scalp
- Any boils or weeping skin rashes
- Signs of fever, such as flushed appearance or shivering
- Complaints of pain or not feeling well
- Vomiting, diarrhea, or drainage from eye(s)
- When a child or family member has been exposed to a harmful communicable disease

By routinely sharing this information among care givers/teachers and families, everyone remains on the lookout for signs and symptoms of illness. When a potential problem arises, the information is necessary so the staff can discuss what to do and, if necessary, obtain appropriate advice about how the program should respond from a health professional.

Source: Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools

FOR A STROKE, THINK F.A.S.T.

Face: Weakness on one side of the face

- Ask the person to smile; this will show if there is drooping or weakness in the muscles on one side of the face.

Arm: Weakness or numbness in one arm

- Ask the person to raise both arms to find out if there is weakness in the limbs.

Speech: Slurred speech or trouble getting the words out

- Ask the person to speak a simple sentence to listen for slurred or distorted speech (e.g., "I have the lunch orders ready.")

Time: Time to CALL 911 if you see any of these signs

- If a person has difficulty with any of these tasks or shows any other signals of a stroke, note the time that the signals began and CALL 911 right away.

Source: American Red Cross Skills Card 2006

