Managing Common Winter Health Concerns

Keeping kids healthy and out of the doctor’s office can be a challenge in the winter months. Learn about the season’s most common health concerns for children and what to do about them. Whenever in doubt, call your child’s doctor.

**COMMON COLD**

*Symptoms:* Runny nose, sneezing, congestion, cough, sore throat, headache, mild fever and poor appetite

*Treating at home:* Place a cool-mist humidifier in your child’s room and use saline nose drops to ease congestion. Provide a children’s fever-reducing medicine (children’s ibuprofen or acetaminophen) at your doctor’s recommendation, always following recommended dosing and product instructions. Never give a child aspirin.

*When to call the doctor:* Cold symptoms in children three-months-old or younger, your child is having trouble breathing, a temperature of 102°F or higher, ear pain, or symptoms that last more than one week.

**RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)**

*Symptoms:* Same as colds; sometimes with wheezing or grunting with breathing

*Treating at home:* Treat RSV as you would a cold and make sure your child gets plenty of rest and fluids.

*When to call the doctor:* The same reasons as for a cold, in addition to extreme fatigue, thick and colored nasal discharge or a cough that continues to worsen.

**FLU (INFLUENZA)**

*Symptoms:* High fever, fatigue, body aches, chills, sore throat, stuffy nose and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea (more common in kids than adults)

*Treating at home:* The best practice is prevention by having your child get a flu shot. If your child does become sick with influenza, rest and lots of fluids work best.

*When to call the doctor:* Flu symptoms in children five-years-old or younger or those with a chronic illness, your child is having trouble breathing, showing signs of dehydration (i.e., producing less urine and fewer tears, feeling very thirsty or having sunken eyes), extreme irritability or if symptoms improve and then return.
**Healthy Snack: Chocolate Dipped Clementines**

Clementines are in season during the winter months and are packed with vitamin C and fiber, making them a great snack choice this time of year.

**Ingredients:**
- 3-4 clementines
- ½ cup dark chocolate chips
- Pinch of sea salt (if desired)

**Instructions:**
1. Line a baking sheet with parchment or wax paper. Peel and segment clementines.
2. Melt the chocolate chips in the microwave, heating for 30 seconds to begin. Dip half the clementine segment in the melted chocolate, place on parchment paper and sprinkle with a pinch of sea salt. Continue with remaining slices and then refrigerate for 10 minutes to harden chocolate before serving.


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**Activity: Snowball Relay**

Split into two even teams. Each team makes one snowball to serve as their race baton. Tramp down a track in the snow wide enough for two people. Your first team member relays around the track with the snowball in hand and hands off to the next team mate. Continue the relay until every team member has completed their lap around the track. Elect a team member to run twice if you have an uneven number of players. Make the course more challenging by building small mounds of snow to climb or jump over.

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**EAR INFECTIONS:**

**Symptoms:** Fever, ear pain, fluid draining from the ear, trouble sleeping, and irritability

**Treating at home:** Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can ease pain and reduce fever. Place a warm, moist cloth over the painful ear.

**When to call the doctor:** Fever higher than 100.4°F or if blood or pus is oozing from the ear.

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**GASTROENTERITIS (STOMACH FLU)**

**Symptoms:** Belly pain, vomiting, watery diarrhea and fever

**Treating at home:** Encourage your child to rest and give them plenty of fluids in small amounts.

**When to call the doctor:** If your child begins to vomit bright-colored bile or blood and if they show signs of dehydration.

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**CROUP**

**Symptoms:** Bark-like, hacking cough and hoarseness, which usually worsen at night

**Treating at home:** Moist air helps. Use a humidifier or sit in a steamy bathroom with your child for 10 minutes. Taking your child out into the cold air or having your child breathe deeply with the freezer door open could also help ease coughing.

**When to call the doctor:** If you hear a high-pitched noise when your child takes a breath in (stridor), notice bluish skin around your child’s lips or fingernails or if you can see your child’s ribs pulling in and out with each breath, head to the emergency department.

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**STREP THROAT**

**Symptoms:** Painful swallowing, tiny red spots on the roof of the mouth, high fever, white patches on the tonsils, decreased appetite, upset stomach

**Treating at home:** If able, have your child gargle warm salt water. Provide acetaminophen or ibuprofen to ease discomfort and reduce fever.

**When to call the doctor:** With any severe sore throat you suspect could be strep.

Remember, good hand washing goes along way and is especially important this time of year. Also, teach your child to cough and sneeze into their elbows to help prevent the spread of germs. If your child is ill, be sure to keep them home from school or daycare to decrease the spread of the illness to other children and adults. They can return when they are fever free for at least 24 hours without a fever-reducing medication and when their symptoms are otherwise improving.