

# 'Tis the Season to be Sick

By Kj Armann, M.D.

Summer is long gone, the kids are back at school, and we all are looking forward to the upcoming holidays. As I like to say " 'Tis the season to be sick." The weather is cooling down and we are spending more time in crowded rooms sharing the air and germs. Schools and daycare are a great reservoir for viruses, the very things that cause so many ailments this time of year.

Our cold and flu season lasts about the length of the school year. So what can we expect for the next eight months? Our younger children, up to about age 8 will experience 10 to 15 viruses in an eight month period of time. The older children will experience about 8 to 10 viruses in the same time frame. Most adults get about 2 to 5 viruses in one season.



Viruses are germs that cause infections such as colds, bronchitis, and most "stomach flu". Viral infections make up at least 85% of all ear infections, throat infections, sinusitis, bronchitis and pneumonia. Viruses can travel through the air, be on our hands, other body surfaces and even on other surfaces like tables. Viruses generally enter our bodies through our mouth, nose or eyes. Did you know that a sneeze travels as fast as 100 miles per hour? So when a sick person sneezes or coughs on you the viruses can enter your body.



The body tries to fight off and kill the viruses. If your body can't kill the virus you will start having symptoms of illness in 1-2 days. These symptoms can last as little as a week or as long as 3 weeks. Not everyone will have the same symptoms even though they have the same virus. For example not everyone gets a fever when they get sick. Fever and sore throat generally last up to 9 days. I want to see anyone who has had a fever for 6 or more days. Anyone with both a fever and a sore throat I think of strep throat and they should be tested for strep. It is the current recommendation that we have laboratory confirmation of strep prior to starting antibiotics. Cough and runny nose can last 14 or more days. Anyone who is breathing 40 times or more per minute or is short of breath walking from one room to another needs to be seen.

With any cold your mucous goes from clear to yellow to green back to yellow and back to clear. Green mucous does not always mean you have a bacterial infection. Green mucous can be associated with inflammation and possible infection so treatment may be indicated. However the treatment does not always include antibiotics. Antibiotics do not kill viruses! Antibiotics are not necessary when you have a cold, the flu or most bronchitis.

Stomach flu is not the flu. I prefer to use the term stomach virus or gastritis for viruses of the gut. Dehydration is of concern for a person who has gastritis. If they do not urinate in an 8 hour period, they maybe dehydrated. This could be caused by excessive vomiting and or diarrhea. Taking sips of fluids such as Pedialyte or other clear liquids like Gatorade or Powerade may help keep you hydrated until you are able to resume a normal diet. Anyone who does not urinate in an 8 hour period needs to be seen in the office.



Influenza, also known as the flu, are highly contagious respiratory viruses caused by either Influenza A or Influenza B. The flu comes on suddenly, where as a cold comes on over several days. Most people will recover from the flu over the next week or two, but some people will develop complications that can be life threatening including pneumonia. People with chronic health problems are at greatest risk for complications of the flu. Our flu season can start as early as November. Typically the busiest month of the year for flu in our area is February.

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The following are symptoms of the flu:

- ❖ Fever or feeling feverish & or the chills (not everyone has a fever)
- ❖ Cough
- ❖ Sore throat
- ❖ Runny or stuffy nose
- ❖ Muscle and or body aches
- ❖ Headaches
- ❖ Fatigue (tiredness)
- ❖ Vomiting and diarrhea in some people, more common in children

Here is what to do for the symptoms of your virus:

- For all colds and viruses drink plenty of fluids (like water and soup).
- For a stuffy or congested nose use a humidifier and saline nose drops or spray.
- Use Vaseline or Aquaphor for red raw runny noses.
- For a dry cough or sore throat gargle with salt water (1 teaspoon of salt in 4 ounces of warm water) and avoid dry air.
- For a moist cough drink more liquids.
- For fever and muscle aches take acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Call the office to get the correct doses for children under 2 years old.
- Apply cool compresses for fever and warm compresses on sore muscles.
- Ear aches will benefit from warm compresses as well.
- Honey works well for nighttime coughs, but don't give honey to children under 1 year of age.
- Sleeping on 2 or 3 pillows will help with nighttime cough and congestion.

One last note, antibiotics do not kill viral infections including the flu. Viral infections have to run their course.

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Dr. Armann is a pediatrician practicing in Santa Clara Valley for over 25 years. His passion is the care and promoting lifelong health for every child. He is a San Jose native; graduated from Los Gatos High and took his residency at UCSF. You can reach Dr. Armann through email at [kjkidmd@gmail.com](mailto:kjkidmd@gmail.com) or call the office at 408- 356-0578