

Keeping the Holidays Healthy!

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As we gear up for the holidays, we must prepare ourselves for the “season of illness” as well. We must expect our children to get sick in the upcoming winter months. Is there anything that we—as Moms—can do to protect our families from the illnesses that are out there?

While there is nothing that guarantees a healthy holiday season, there are a number of tricks for staying well. Many of these are very simple but often forgotten or ignored in the rush of daily life.

To help stop the spread of respiratory illnesses like the cold and flu, there are two critical actions to undertake: *teach your child to cover his mouth **with his elbow** when he coughs or sneezes* to prevent literally tens of thousands of germs from being airborne your direction. Does this sound silly? Think for a minute about watching a grown-up sneeze into his hand and then extend it for you to shake: YUCK! Not so nice to meet you after all! Secondly, *teach your child to use kleenex for his runny nose* (not his sleeve or his mitten or his bare hand) and then to throw the kleenex away, washing his hands after he does so.

These two simple actions will do a great deal to stop the spread of respiratory illness in your household. But what about at school and in the grocery store and wherever else you go with your kids? Thankfully these two suggestions still apply, but so does another golden rule: *do not let your child go to school (or visiting or shopping) while he is sick*. With even a cold, your child is harboring germs that may be medically significant for others: his friend at school may have asthma worsened by colds; the grandmother in the checkout line may have heart disease. And remember: a sick child needs rest: what is good for others happens to be best for him, too.

With so many single Moms in this country and with so many families with both parents working, there is tremendous pressure on families to drop their kids at school or daycare while they are still sick. We all know families who give their children Tylenol or Advil before dropping them off in order to hide a fever the child already has...Of course this is counterproductive, allowing and inviting the spread of infectious disease to say nothing of robbing the sick child of the chance to stay at home until he is feeling better. A far better solution is to plan ahead: *now*, while your children are well, anticipate an illness or two or three in the next few weeks and plan for “sick” child care. Can you take off from work? Can a friend or family member care take your children?

Finally, the holiday season is a time of kissing, kissing and more kissing. Please remember that a child or grown-up with a runny nose or a cough is not a great candidate for a kiss! A quick hug can convey affection without also conveying germs and, frankly, is often greatly preferred by children anyway.

Dr. Charlotte Cowan is a board certified pediatrician and author of 5 medical children's stories that entertain, educate, and reassure both parent and child. Covering fever, colds, earaches, and sore throats, each book includes a *Parent Guide*. For information about her latest title, *The Moose with Loose Poops*, visit: <http://www.drhippo.com/>