

staying well this winter

By Kim Newth*

guide to common winter illnesses

influenza

Signs and symptoms: Fever and chills, sore throat, dry cough, headache, fatigue and body aches. Influenza may also lead to more serious complications like pneumonia. The worst symptoms usually last about five days, but coughing can continue for two to three weeks.

What to do? While your child is unwell, keep them away from school and preschool and make sure they have plenty of rest and fluids. If your child becomes drowsy or non-responsive, or if their breathing becomes fast and noisy, then seek medical advice immediately.

Influenza immunisation is recommended for children and is free for children from 6-months with an ongoing medical condition. More info at: www.fightflu.co.nz/information-for-parents/

common cold

Signs and symptoms: Sore throats, runny or blocked noses, watery eyes and sneezing, or coughs can last one to two weeks. Many different infectious viruses cause colds, such as the highly contagious common cold virus, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV).

What to do? As there is no cure, it comes down to alleviating symptoms, but please note many over-the-counter cough and cold remedies are not suitable for children under the age of 6-years. Most colds will clear up of their own accord within a few days. Ensure your child has plenty of rest and a good intake of fluids.

Relieve blocked noses with vapour rubs, i.e., menthol, (but avoid rubs on clothes or pillows for babies under 3-months).

Keep your child away from school or preschool in the first few days when symptoms are at their worst. If the symptoms do not improve, consult a doctor.

Ways to stop the spread: Teach your children to cough into the crook of their elbow and show them how to use tissues. Ensure they wash their hands after coughing, sneezing or blowing their nose. Used tissues need to go straight into the rubbish bin.

Be asthma aware: Colds can also sometimes trigger asthma, as can cooler temperature changes. Keep up with inhalers if they've been prescribed and see your GP if symptoms worsen. More info at www.asthmanz.co.nz

bronchiolitis

Signs and symptoms: This is a lower-airway infection (ie, lung infection). Symptoms include cough, fever, wheezing and, in more serious cases, rapid heartbeat and rapid, shallow breathing. RSV may also cause this lung infection, which often strikes children under-2.

What to do? While the symptoms are usually not severe, babies and infants with much smaller airways, and who may have other chronic illnesses, can be seriously affected. You can care for a child who is not seriously ill at home by making sure they rest and have plenty to drink. Seek medical help if your child has any kind of difficulty breathing or starts to get dehydrated.

middle ear infections

Often start with a cold and are very common in children under 6-years.

Signs and symptoms: Grizzly, crying more than usual, waking in night, pulling on ears, raised temperature.

What to do? Paracetamol and ibuprofen will help to ease ear pain and fever, which can be significant. Most children will feel better without any treatment after several days, but some may require antibiotics. If any fluid is discharging or you suspect an ear infection, consult your family GP. After the symptoms have gone, you should check that the fluid in the middle ear has cleared, because if not, this can lead to temporary hearing loss and blockage of the ears, known as 'glue ear'. Your family GP will be able to advise you further on this.

croup

Infants and toddlers are most at risk of getting croup.

Key symptoms: It will probably start like a cold but after a few days turn into a barking cough. Breathing will become hoarse and noisy. Symptoms may last five or six days.

What to do? If the cough continues at night, try steaming up the bathroom and letting them breathe in the warm, damp air for 15 minutes or so. Seek emergency help if severe symptoms develop (i.e., difficulty breathing or speaking).

whooping cough (pertussis)

Signs and symptoms: Include a runny nose, but also a temperature, followed by a cough. The cough may get progressively worse, making it hard for your child to breathe and sometimes causing them to make a 'whooping' sound. The cough can last for several months and can lead to pneumonia.

What to do? On-time immunisations for infants (6 weeks, 3 & 5 months), plus boosters (at 4 and 11 years) is the best prevention. If your child does get whooping cough, have them seen by your GP. There is currently an epidemic of whooping cough, and booster shots are seen as the key to avoiding the bug, as immunisations only last for a limited time.

sore throats/tonsillitis

Bacterial infections of the throat or tonsils are more common during winter.

Signs and symptoms: include a very sore throat over more than several days, pain when swallowing, a high temperature and headache, along with red and swollen tonsils.

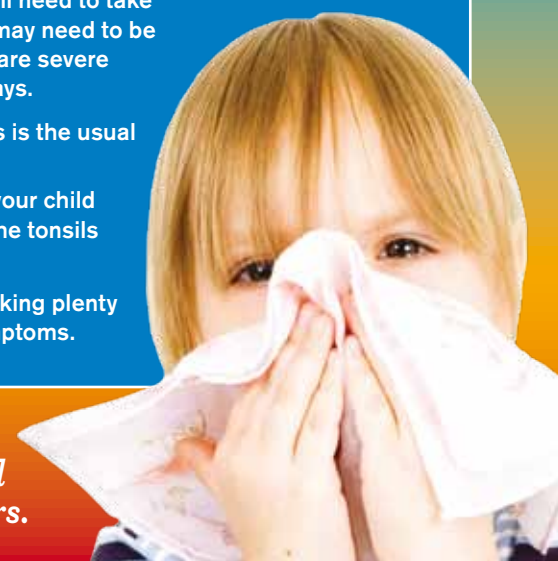
What to do? Your child will need to take a few days off school and may need to be seen by a GP if symptoms are severe or last longer than a few days.

The bacteria streptococcus is the usual cause of tonsillitis.

Strep throat occurs when your child has a sore throat without the tonsils being affected.

Pain relief, resting and drinking plenty of fluids will help ease symptoms.

herbal relief for colds: *drink honey dissolved in hot water with the addition of some lemon juice and ground ginger or a tea made from equal parts elderflowers, hyssop and mint. Take these drinks hot every two hours.*



top 5 immune-boosters

- Zinc has antibacterial and antiviral properties and stimulates white blood cell function to fight infection.
- Vitamin C is well known for its antioxidant activity and can reduce the duration and severity of colds.
- Vitamin A increases the activity of white blood cells, and helps expel mucous from the body
- The B-complex vitamins are readily depleted by stress and illness, but are absolutely essential for the production of energy by the body's cells, including cells of the immune system.
- Probiotics can help replenish the good bacteria in your gut which is often reduced during illness or antibiotics.

test: 10 easy ways to catch a cold this winter:

- 1 Cough and sneeze into hands, then don't wash them
- 2 Don't keep your home heated to a comfortable, even temperature
- 3 Don't keep children warm in cold weather with gloves, socks and woolly hats
- 4 Allow your children to bring home friends with runny noses
- 5 Let your children stay up late and stay up late yourself
- 6 Forget to serve fresh fruit and veggies
- 7 Choose a diet high in fat and sugar
- 8 Do very little exercise in your family
- 9 Allow your children to spend more than two hours a day in front of television, computers and gaming consoles
- 10 Don't properly manage your child's fluid intake

Don't tick anything on this list for a happy, healthy winter!

If you are worried about someone in your family this winter, call Healthline (0800 611 116) for advice or see a doctor.

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food for thought

To keep your family's immune system strong and healthy, a good, varied diet is essential. Here are some key ingredients:

- Start with a healthy breakfast, such as porridge with fresh, dried, stewed or canned fruit.
- Try to include seasonable winter vegetables at meal-times. Winter casseroles and soups – chicken or pumpkin soup, for example – are great over winter.
- If your children are regularly coming down with sniffles, you should increase their consumption of vitamin C-rich fruit and vegetables. You may wish to try junior-strength immune boosting vitamin tablets containing vitamin C (but a good diet should be enough).

Preschool children should eat at least four servings of vegetables and fruit each day, while children and young people aged 5- to 18-years should eat at least five such servings.

Serving size examples:

- 1 medium potato or kūmara
- ½ cup cooked vegetables (eg, broccoli, peas, corn, spinach, pūhū)
- 1 carrot
- 1 apple, pear, banana or orange
- 2 small apricots or plums
- ½ cup fresh fruit salad
- ½ cup stewed or tinned fruit

A good varied diet will also include breads and cereals, milk and milk products, lean meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds.



* Kim is a Rangiora-based freelance writer and mother of two daughters.

References: www.health.govt.nz, www.besthealth.bmj.com, Herbal drink: *The Illustrated Herbal Encyclopedia* by Brenda Little, Abbeydale Press, 1999

keeping young children safe this winter

Most of us spend more time indoors during the winter. Fires are lit and heaters cranked up to keep everyone warm. A flickering flame or the glow from a heater can be fascinating to children, who are too young to understand how dangerous they can be.

Babies around 4-9 months are particularly active and can quickly cover more floor than you might expect. Keep a close eye on them as they may get themselves too close to the heater and be unable to get away again.

Below are some things you can do to help keep your family safe and warm this winter:

keeping safe with fires and heaters

The NZ Fire Service has a very simple rule: "Keep a metre from the heater". This means people and furniture should be at least one metre from a heater or fire to reduce the risk of being burned, catching their clothes on fire, or causing a fire.

Having a safety guard around all heaters and fires will help prevent children getting burned. Look for a guard that:

- can be securely attached to the wall
- has bars or mesh to stop children putting their arms or other objects through
- is high enough that a child can't climb over the top

baby's bedroom

Keeping your house warm and dry is vital for a healthy home, but overheated rooms are not safe for babies, so it's important to strike a balance.

- Babies usually need one more layer of clothing or bedding than adults. Natural fabrics that breathe, such as wool and cotton, are best.
- To check if your baby is too hot or cold, touch the back of their neck underneath their clothing. If that area feels warm, they are fine, even if their hands and feet are cold; if it feels cold, pop another layer on them.
- Gas heaters can give off dangerous fumes, and fan heaters can overheat the room. Using an electric heater (either convection or oil-filled) with a thermostat is best.
- Keep your baby's room well ventilated with doors open - especially if you are using a heater.
- Bassinets or cots should be kept away from windows, as this is the coldest part of the room.

what to look for when choosing safe nightwear

- Close fitting clothing reduces the risk of catching fire. Buy pyjamas that fit your child properly rather than buying a size that are too big and baggy.
- Check the label on nightwear for a "low fire danger" label. This means the design of the garment is close-fitting to reduce the risk of it catching fire. Note that it does not mean the fabric is fire proof - it can still burn if exposed to a heat source.

For more information, support or advice, PlunketLine (0800 933 922) is free and available 24/7.



healthy homes

A warm, dry home is really important for your child's health and safety. The World Health Organisation recommends aiming to keep the temperature within your house at least 18°C. Insulation is a proven way to achieve this. So too is double-glazing your windows. A heating system can only be fully effective when your house isn't draughty and damp. As well as installing insulation, you can minimise additional draughts by using draught-proofing strips around windows and doors.

Damp and mould are a leading cause of respiratory illness and you should aim to have a mould-free house. Getting rid of mould as soon as you notice it, as well as airing your home on fine days, is vital. Dry your clothes outside and fix any leaky taps, guttering or wet areas around your home.