

Colds and flu top pediatric health concern



In the 2011 Dayton Children's Regional Pediatric Health Assessment, parents were asked to indicate up to three health and safety issues of the greatest concern to them.

Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated colds and flu as a top concern. Although the survey was conducted during flu season, this answer is not surprising since 75 percent of parents reported their child had a cold and 17 percent had the flu during the last 12 months.

This paper outlines and discusses the key findings from the 2011 assessment around colds and flu and how these preventable illnesses could be better addressed in our community.

Colds continue to be number 1 reason for doctor's visit, missed school

With kids getting as many as eight colds per year or more, this contagious viral infection of the upper respiratory tract is the most common infectious disease

in the United States and the number one reason kids visit the doctor and stay home from school.

Most colds are caused by rhinoviruses, which are invisible droplets in the air we breathe or on things we touch. More than

100 different rhinoviruses can breach the protective lining of the nose and throat, triggering an immune system reaction that can cause a sore throat and headache, and make it hard to breathe through the nose.

Air that's dry, both indoors or out, can also lower resistance to infection by the viruses that cause colds. The presence of tobacco smoke can also lower resistance to infection. People who smoke or who are routinely exposed to smoke are more likely to catch a cold than people who don't — and their symptoms will probably

be worse, last longer, and are more likely to lead to bronchitis or even pneumonia.

"Colds are most contagious during the first two to four days after symptoms appear, and may be contagious for up to three weeks," says Sherman Alter, MD, medical director of the infectious disease department at Dayton Children's. "Children can catch a cold from person-to-person contact or by breathing in virus particles spread by sneezing or coughing. Touching the mouth or nose after touching skin or another surface contaminated with a rhinovirus can also spread a cold."

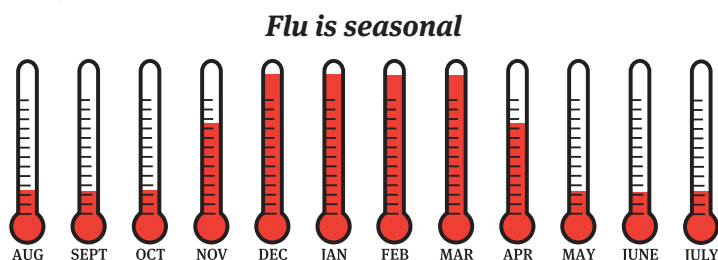
There's no vaccine, but colds can be prevented

Because so many viruses cause colds, there isn't a vaccine that can protect against them. But to help kids from catching a cold, kids should:

- ▶ Stay away from anyone who has a cold. Virus particles can travel up to 12 feet through the air when someone with a cold coughs or sneezes.
- ▶ Stay away from anyone who smokes. Secondhand smoke can make children more likely to get sick.
- ▶ **Wash their hands** thoroughly and frequently, especially after blowing their noses. Children can sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice to make sure they are washing long enough.
- ▶ Cover their noses and mouths when coughing or sneezing. (Have them sneeze or cough into a shirtsleeve, though, not their hands — this helps prevent the spread of germs.)
- ▶ Not use the same towels or eating utensils as someone who has a cold. Children also shouldn't drink from the same glass, can, or bottle as anyone else.
- ▶ Not pick up other people's used tissues.

Flu is seasonal

Influenza, commonly known as “the flu,” is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract. Although the flu affects both sexes and all age groups, kids tend to get it more often than adults due to their immature immune systems. The illness even has its own season — typically from November to April, with most cases occurring between late December and early March.



Source: KidsHealth

The flu can be spread by virus-infected droplets that are coughed or sneezed into the air. People infected with the flu are contagious from one day before they feel sick until their symptoms have resolved (usually about one week for adults, but can be up to two weeks for young children).

The best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine. Getting the shot before the flu season is in full force allows the body a chance to build immunity to, or protection from, the virus.

“Although parents and children can get a flu shot well into flu season, it’s best to try to get it as soon as it’s available,” says Dr. Alter. “However, even when there are only two or three months left in the flu season, it’s still a good idea to get protection if the vaccine is available.”

A nonshot option, the nasal mist vaccine, is also available, but because it contains weakened live flu viruses it is not recommended for people with weakened immune systems or certain health conditions. Parents should check with their child’s doctor to see if their child can — or should — get this type of flu vaccine.

Where Can My Family Get Flu Shots?

Flu shots are typically available at:

- ▶ Many health care settings, including doctors’ offices and public, employee, and university health clinics.
- ▶ Some pharmacies
- ▶ Some supermarkets
- ▶ Some community groups

Check with your health insurance plan to see if the flu shot is covered. Otherwise, flu shots may cost anywhere from \$10 to \$50.

Who should get the flu shot?

Federal health officials urge flu vaccination for all children 6 months of age and older. Although young children (from 6 months to 5 years old) are still considered the group of children who need the flu vaccine the most, updated guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommend that all older kids and teens get it, too (as long as enough is available).

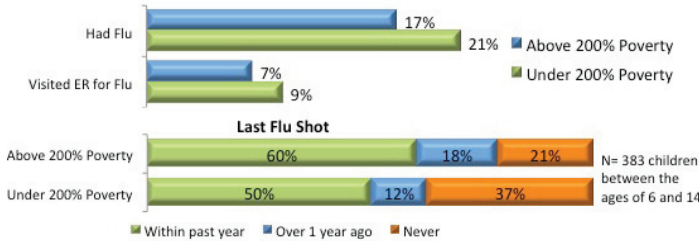
Other high-risk kids who should get the flu vaccine include those who:

- ▶ Were born prematurely and are at increased risk of developing lung problems if they get influenza.
- ▶ Have chronic heart or lung disorders, including asthma.
- ▶ Have chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, kidney disease, severe anemia, or immune deficiency (including HIV/AIDS and immunosuppression caused by drugs).
- ▶ Are on long-term aspirin therapy and may be at risk for Reye syndrome if they catch the flu.
- ▶ Live with someone in any of the high-risk groups above.

However, according to the Dayton Children’s 2011 Regional Pediatric Health Assessment, children from low-income households are significantly more likely to have

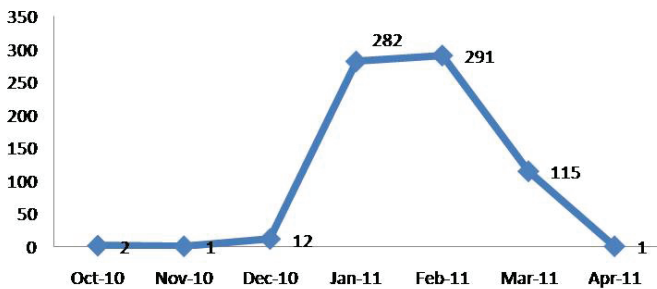
never had a flu shot than children from households above 200 percent of poverty. Likewise, children from households below 200 percent of poverty are also more likely to have had the flu in the past year and to have used emergency services for treatment of the flu.

Influenza by Income



In fact, during the last flu season (October 2010 to April 2011), Dayton Children’s saw 704 children in the emergency department for the flu. During January and February 2011, when visits were at the highest for the flu, they accounted for nearly 5 percent of total patients seen in each of those two months.

Dayton children’s flu season — 2010-2011



Extra flu prevention precautions

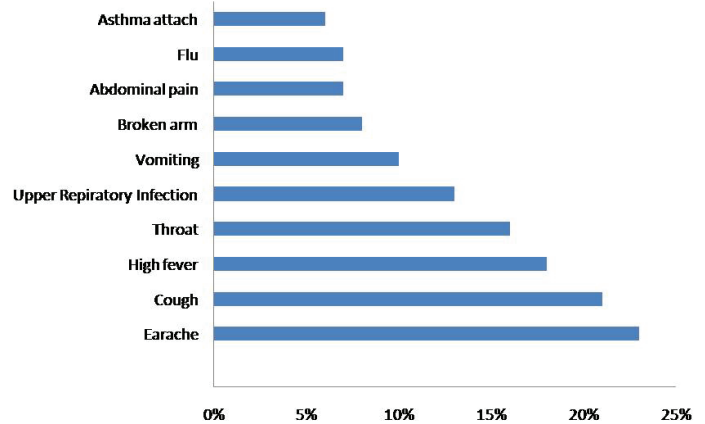
There’s no guaranteed way — including being vaccinated — to prevent anyone from getting the flu. But precautions that can help protect against the flu include:

- ▶ Avoiding large crowds whenever possible
- ▶ Practicing good hand washing
- ▶ Never picking up used tissues
- ▶ Never sharing cups and eating utensils
- ▶ Staying home from work or school when someone is sick with the flu
- ▶ Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze

Emergency care for colds and flu

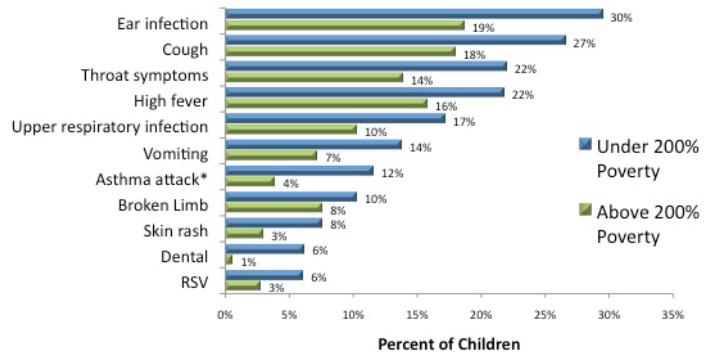
In the 2011 assessment, parents were asked to indicate whether or not their child needed emergency care within the last 12 months, where they went for the emergency care, and the reasons for emergency care. The top reason for emergency care was earache closely followed by cough, high fever, throat and upper respiratory infection – all symptoms of the cold and/or flu.

Top 10 reasons for emergency care



In addition, while children do not differ overall in their frequency of use of emergency services, children from lower income households appear more likely to use emergency services for a number of conditions including cough, earaches, throat symptoms and high fever.

Type of emergency care by income level



*Statistically significant

Next steps for cold and flu prevention

Colds and flu are two very spreadable, yet preventable, illnesses that not only impact a child's health but also impact school and work attendance costing employers and the health care system millions of dollars each year. The best way to decrease the frequency of colds and flu is through prevention.

Is it the cold or the flu?

Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between the cold and the flu. Here are some common symptoms.

Flu vs. Colds: A Guide to Symptoms

Questions	Flu	Cold
Was the onset of illness...	sudden?	slow?
Does your child have a...	high fever?	no (or mild) fever?
Is your child's exhaustion level...	severe?	mild?
Is your child's head...	achy?	headache-free?
Is your child's appetite...	decreased?	normal?
Are your child's muscles...	achy?	fine?
Does your child have...	chills?	no chills?

If most of your answers fell into the first category, chances are your child has the flu. If your answers were usually in the second category, it's most likely a cold. Not all colds and flu warrant a visit to the doctor's office but if you or your child have difficulty breathing, chest pain, persistent fever, vomiting or inability to keep fluids down, painful swallowing, persistent coughing or persistent congestion, and headaches you may want to call your doctor or local nurse hotline.

Some bacterial diseases, like strep throat or pneumonia, also can look like the flu or a cold. It's important to get medical attention immediately if your child seems to be getting worse, is having any trouble breathing, has a high fever, has a bad headache, has a sore throat, or seems confused.

Dayton Children's will focus on the following interventions:

- ▶ Provide additional education through our website, media outreach and parent presentations on cold and flu symptoms, how to prevent the flu, and what to do if your child gets a cold or the flu. We want parents to be confident in their ability to prevent and manage colds and the flu for their child.
- ▶ Continue to promote the flu vaccine for all recommended populations and particularly for children. In 2011, Dayton Children's will require mandatory flu vaccinations of all employees so we help stop the flu from spreading

About the assessment

The 2011 Regional Pediatric Health Assessment, generously funded by Dayton Children's Foundation Board and conducted by Schwartz Consulting Partners, Inc., was administered between January and March 2011. The survey included both online and telephone responses of over 600 parents and guardians, the primary health care decision makers of children 14 years old and younger in a 13 county area served by Dayton Children's. This assessment helps Dayton Children's and its partners identify pediatric health and safety issues that require communitywide attention and action.

For the complete 2011 Regional Pediatric Health Assessment, please visit www.childrensdayton.org. If you have questions about the information in this report, please contact Dayton Children's at 937-641-3666.



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