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Tips to protect your child from viral infections

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Many viral infections result in fever and body aches or discomfort



A viral illness in children is any condition caused by a virus. The word 'virus' has its origins in Latin and means 'poison' or 'toxin'. There are many viruses which exist, and some haven't even been discovered yet. Viral infections are common among people of all age but often seem to be concentrated in infants and children. We will never want to see our child ill and laid out in bed. Unfortunately, viral infections and children seem to be best friends! Child contracts many infections in school from other kids. Viral infection is the most frequent of them.

Without being aware of the health hazard in their surroundings, children, especially under the age of two years, are more prone to mild as well as life-threatening viral illness. The immune system which inhibits the growth of the virus in the body, control the infection process and fight back the sickness is usually not as strong as that in adults. The data released by The United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation also indicates the continued high mortality risk in the first year of Indian children's life. Viral infections such as rotavirus and enteric viral illness pose more serious threats to children in comparison to adults.

Most childhood viral infections are not serious and include such diverse illnesses as cold, running nose, watery eyes, sore throat, fever, skin rashes, vomiting and diarrhea. Some viral illnesses that cause more serious disease, convulsions, measles etc., are less common now due to widespread immunization.

If symptoms persists in children for more than a week, it's time to take them to a physician as these could be the clarion call against viral infections and lead to complications as pneumonia etc. At that time child should go for blood testing for malaria, dengue, typhoid, chikungunya, arbovirus etc including complete blood count.

Antibiotics cannot cure viral infections. Most children with viral infections get better without treatment, and many viral infections are so distinctive that a doctor can diagnose them based on their symptoms. A doctor usually does not need to have a laboratory identify the specific virus involved.

Many viral infections result in fever and body aches or discomfort. Doctors sometimes treat these symptoms with mild pain killers and anti-inflammatory drugs. Aspirin should be avoided specially in children or adolescents with these symptoms, as it can lead to severe complications. Generally, parents can tell whether their child is ill with a potentially serious infection and needs immediate medical care. This is particularly true for children beyond infancy.

Parents generally take extra care of their children during the change in weather or when it rains badly. But, it is important to know that children require extra care across the seasons as they are at a higher risk of viral infections than adults. Viral infections are very common, seasonal changes and can be carried through air ventilation systems.

Few of the common tips to protect children from viral infections are:

- **Replace handkerchiefs with skincare wipe & tissue paper** - Parents are often seen carrying cotton handkerchiefs for wiping the face or running nose of their children again and again, which can be dangerous because the children are getting re-exposed to the virus. The wet and medicated skincare wipes and tissue papers are mild on the skin in comparison to the cloth handkerchief. And the best part is that they can simply be disposed after use. Parents should make sure to immediately wash hands with soap and water thoroughly to wash off the harmful bacteria which tend to cling to hands.
- **Keep children away from those with infectious illness** while playing with friends in the neighborhood or at school.
- **Ensure good hygiene** by keeping nails clean to prevent accumulation of germs & dirt and proper hand washing.
- **Maintain cleanliness around the children** - Mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, and bug are the most active carriers of harmful bacteria & viruses. The child is their easy target. Check for any standing water nearby and around, in order to prevent mosquito breeding. Limit the outdoor visits of your children during the morning and evening. Keep neighborhood free from trash, discarded containers, and bins to inhibit mosquito breeding.
- **Vaccinate in time** - Vaccination is the best and effective way to protect infants and children from deadly infections and diseases. Still, parents overlook this aspect, which is important for their children's well-being. Only when the signs and symptoms are visible, the parents rush to hospital to get a vaccine. Vaccination for Diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough (pertussis) (DTaP), Polio (IPV), Rotavirus (RV), Influenza (flu), Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) in the early life of the child is imperative.
- **Boost children's immunity to fight against viruses** - Strengthening the immune system of children is one of the unbeatable ways to provide protection against viral infections. Give nutritious food with a balanced diet. Breast-milk is the best food for the infants. Fresh fruits and veggies are must for the children of all age groups. Keep the children hydrated with water, milk, and fruit juice. Limit their intake of unhealthy food and snacks such as soda, chips,

chocolates, and cookies, and increase the consumption of oatmeal and cereals.

- **Keep child indoors during the first rain** of the season as it contains acidic elements which can cause skin problems. It is advised to keep young kids and infants inside during the rain or during monsoon season as young children tend to fall sick frequently during this season. Kids should be kept away from rain till the weather stabilizes.
- **Parents should take care of themselves too**, so that they don't transmit their virus or infection to their children.

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