

DOCTOR'S ADVICE: WHY DO MY KIDS GET SICK ALL THE TIME AND WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?



*If you're tired of having sick kids on your hands all the time, then we hear you mama! Having unwell youngsters is never fun for anyone, so we've enlisted the help of family GP, **Dr. Cheryl Kam** to get her best advice on why our kids get sick, and what we can do to keep them well!*

First of all, what's normal?

It can be frustrating to see kids fall ill so often, and with more than one child in the household, it can get busy for mum and dad too!

It's fairly normal for young children to get 6-8 respiratory infections a year, and 2-3 gastrointestinal infections a year, none of these requiring antibiotics. Children at nursery and school tend to have more illnesses due to exposure to other sick children.

Why my kids?

Children are at risk of illness mainly due to the fact they haven't mastered the art of personal hygiene, as well as their natural tendency to enjoy putting things in their mouths! Children also haven't been on the planet long enough to build up strong immunities to common pathogens. Thankfully this does improve as they get older.

How are germs transmitted?

There are 4 ways germs are transmitted.

The first is through direct contact. Common infections transmitted this way are impetigo, scabies, lice, chickenpox, cold sores, ringworm and pinkeye/sore eyes (conjunctivitis).

Other germs travel by droplets in the air, from an infected person's lungs, mouth or nose (watch those sneezes!). The common cold, pertussis, pneumonia and the flu are examples.

Thirdly, germs can spread via the faecal-oral route. This can happen for example, when after a diaper change the hands are not cleaned entirely and then food is prepared. Germs therefore make their way from stool to mouth – yikes! Illnesses caused in this manner include diarrhoea, pinworms, and hepatitis A.

Lastly infections can also spread through direct blood contact (nasties likes Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and Cytomegalovirus).



Don't be a dope, wash your hands with water and soap!

Apart from the last route, most infections can be prevented by frequent hand washing with soap and water. Alcohol or sanitizer gel is useful in removing bacteria and some viruses, but good ol' soap and warm water has been found to be the best in tackling both, even resistant strains of viruses.

It's therefore essential to cultivate a habit of frequent hand washing with your children and helpers. Make it a point after using the bathroom, changing diapers and before eating.

Also, teach your little ones not to touch their faces with dirty hands until they've washed their hands properly. Toys and objects that your kids explore by mouth should be washed regularly too, and dirty tissues should be thrown away each time and never reused.

What is the right way to wash?

Wet hands under warm running water (warm is more effective than cold at removing dirt and germs) and lather up with any liquid or bar soap. Scrub for 15 to 20 seconds (tell young kids to hum the Happy Birthday song in their heads twice).

Other ways to ward against illnesses...

Not sharing food

Train your kids not to be too relaxed about sharing food with their friends, as illnesses are often contagious before symptoms start to show. Start at home by having everyone use their own straws, utensils and food portions – you might find that your kids tend not to be as comfortable sharing their food with strangers.

Sleep well!

Infants need 14 to 15 hours a day of sleep, 12 to 14 for toddlers, 11 to 13 for preschoolers and 10 to 11 for school age kids. Good rest enables the body to better do its job at fighting infections.

Stress less!

Cultivating good emotional health from a young age means littlies will stress less, and

get ill less often too. Teens can often have a bunch of conflicting commitments, such as sport, exams, music lessons, friends and boyfriends or girlfriends. On top of that, they can worry about what's next for them.

It's important to focus on one task at a time, and teach kids that it is OK to say no to some duties and obligations to prevent them from getting overwhelmed and stressed.

Laugh!

Take time to have a laugh, as it has been proven to lower tension and improve blood circulation and concentration. If you're like me and terrible at jokes, simply watch a favourite sitcom, or put a comedy into the DVD player and you're good to go!

Exercise

Just 20 minutes of exercise has been shown to improve mood for a good 12 hours afterwards, so it's important to ensure our kids get enough exercise no matter how busy they are. Find out what type of exercise appeals to your children, and cultivate their physical activity habits, whether it's football, ballet, gym or athletics.

Good nutrition

Eating well can also keep your child's immune system in top shape, and including the following in their diet can really help:

- * **Plain yogurt** for calcium, protein and potassium
- * **Eggs** for protein, choline, and other vitamins and minerals
- * **Nuts** for protein, "good" fats, fibre and antioxidants
- * **Berries** for antioxidants, phytonutrients and fibre
- * **Beans** for fibre, protein, magnesium and potassium

Taking a good formulation of age appropriate doses of Vitamin C and Zinc can also help boost the immune system.

If you're worried about how often your child is getting ill, it's always good practice to book them in for a consultation with your GP who can help you work out why and offer helpful solutions too!



Dr. Cheryl Kam is a firm believer in the traditional model of holistic general practice, and considers it a huge privilege to journey with each of her patients through various life stages. Her international experience in emergency medicine, travel medicine, palliative care and family medicine gives her a rounded interpretation of the health and wellbeing of the family as a unit. She loves her job, and continues to pursue the specialty of Family Medicine at a Masters level. Outside of work she is a beach bumming island hopper, a keen scuba diver, half marathon runner, and enjoys expressing herself through writing. She serves the community through social efforts supported by **CHARIS**. You might spot her on other days, exploring the laid back neighbourhoods of Singapore in her flip flops. Read more at her [website](#).

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