How to tell the difference between spring allergies and coronavirus disease (or any other respiratory virus)



Every spring I find bunched up tissues wedged everywhere- in the cup-holders of the car, in couch crevices, and in the bottom of back packs. Yes, beautiful flowering spring is here in the United States along with lots of pollen to tickle everyone's noses. But this year, along with the pollen, the coronavirus disease, aka COVID-19, has swept in.

So how can you tell when your children's noses become congested and they start coughing, if your child has spring allergies or coronavirus disease? While there is an overlap in

symptoms between allergies and viruses, there are a few distinguishing features:

Allergies Itch

Itchy nose, itchy eyes, itchy throat. If your child is doing a lot of facial rubbing or throat clearing, you can fairly accurately blame allergies. If needed, treat these annoying itches with allergy medicine such as cetirizine (brand name Zyrtec), loratadine (brand name claritin), or fexofenadine (Brand name Allegra). You can also read our prior post about spring allergies. Allergy medicine does not improve these symptoms if your child has a virus.

Fever: Viruses can cause fever. Allergies do not.

If your child has a fever along with their runny or stuffy nose, coughing, sore throat, and watery eyes, think VIRUS. Also, think "contagious." In contrast, allergies do not trigger fevers. So if your child has sudden onset of respiratory symptoms WITH FEVER, you can't blame it on allergies.

Age

If your child is younger than a year, it is unlikely that they will show signs of spring allergies because they have never been exposed to spring pollen. A person needs to be sensitized to something before they can be allergic to it. If it is only your child's first spring, they will not show signs of allergies. Usually, cold symptoms in a child this young means that your child does, in fact, have a cold virus.

While we do have medications to treat allergies, respiratory viruses, including the one caused by covid-19, have to run their course.

The following are helpful websites to keep up with emerging information about the novel coronavirus disease, or COVID-19:

Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov)
Your state’s Health Department (You can click here for the PA Health Department)
World Health Organization (https://www.who.int/)

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