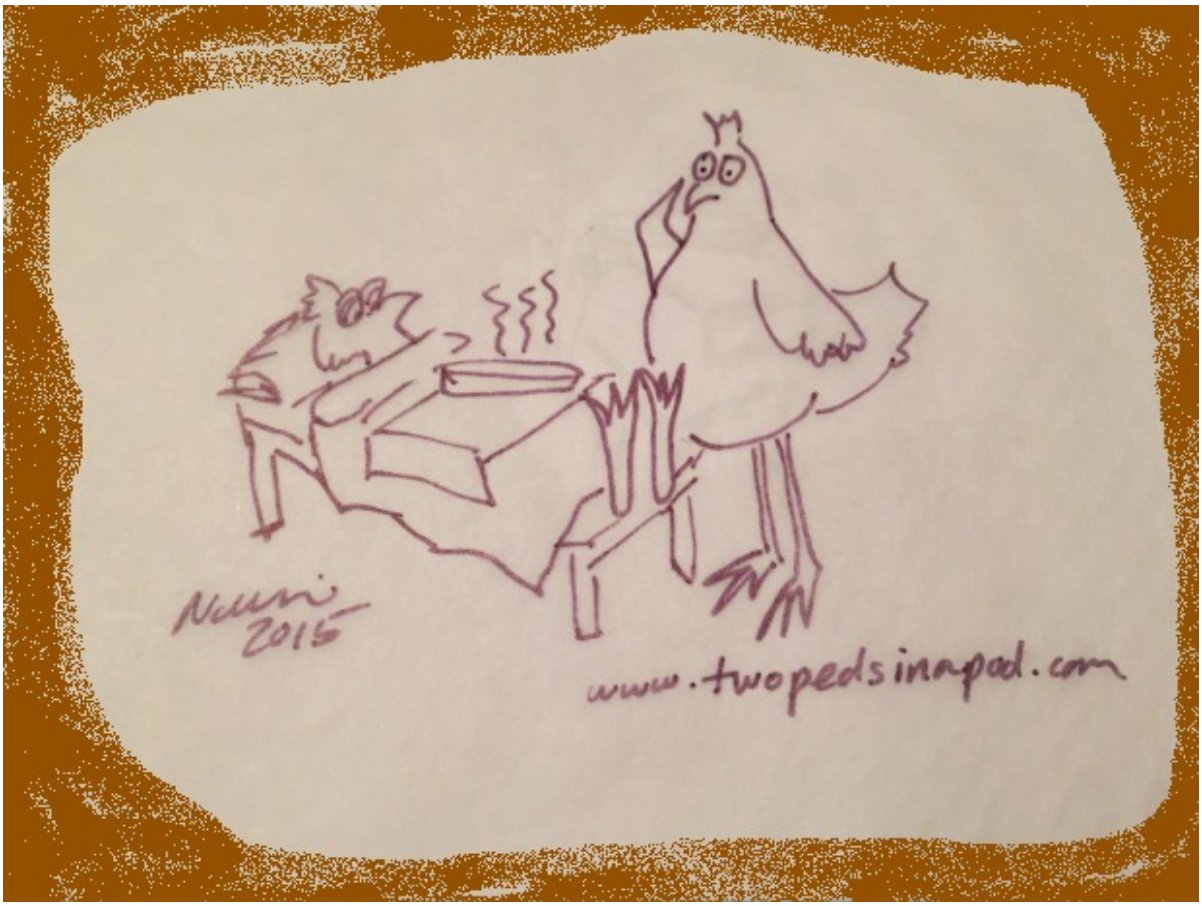
Does my child have a cold or the flu?



"Now what kind of soup did the doctor recommend? Was that tomato soup? Mushroom Barley?"

Headlines remind us daily that the US is officially in the midst of flu season. We are also in the midst of a really yucky cold season. We have seen numerous kids in our offices with bad colds and others with flu.

Parents ask us every day how they can tell if their child has a cold or the flu. While no method is fool proof, here are some typical differences:

The flu, caused by influenza virus, comes on suddenly and makes you feel as if you've been hit by a truck.

Flu almost always causes fever of 101°F or higher and some respiratory symptoms such as runny nose, cough, or sore throat (many times, all three). Children, more often than adults, sometimes will vomit and have diarrhea along with their respiratory symptoms, but contrary to popular belief, there is no such thing as "stomach flu." In addition to the usual respiratory symptoms, the flu causes body aches, headaches, and often the sensation of your eyes burning. The fever usually lasts 5-7 days. All symptoms come on at once; there is nothing gradual about coming down with the flu.

Colds, even really yucky ones, start out gradually.

Think back to your last cold: first your throat felt scratchy or sore, then the next day your nose got stuffy or then started running profusely, then you developed a cough. **Sometimes during a cold you get a fever for a few days.** Sometimes you get hoarse and lose your voice. The same gradual progression of symptoms occurs in kids. In addition, kids often feel tired because of interrupted sleep from cough or nasal congestion. This tiredness leads to extra crankiness.

Usually kids still feel well enough to play and attend school with colds.

The average length of a cold is 7-10 days although sometimes it takes two weeks or more for all coughing and nasal congestion to resolve.

Important news flash about mucus:

The mucus from a cold can be thick, thin, clear, yellow, green, or white, and can change from one to the other, all in the same cold. The color of mucus does NOT tell you if your

child needs an antibiotic and will not help you differentiate between a cold and the flu. Here's a post on sinus infections vs. a cold.

Remember: colds = gradual and annoying. Flu = sudden and miserable.

If your child has a runny nose and cough, but is drinking well, playing well, sleeping well and does not have a fever and the symptoms have been around for a few days, the illness is unlikely to "turn into the flu."

Fortunately, a vaccine against the flu is available for all kids over 6 months old

This flu vaccine can prevent the misery of the flu. In addition, vaccines against influenza save lives by preventing flu-related complications such as pneumonia, encephalitis (brain infection), and severe dehydration. Even though we are starting to see a lot of flu, it is not too late to get the flu vaccine for your child. Please schedule a flu vaccine ASAP if your child has not yet received one for this season. Parents and caregivers should also immunize themselves. We all know how well a household functions when Mom or Dad have the flu… not very well! Sadly there have been 20 children so far this flu season who died from the flu. In past years many flu deaths were in kids who did not receive the flu vaccine, so please vaccinate your children against the flu if you have not already. Unfortunately, the vaccine isn't effective in babies younger than 6 months, so it is important to vaccinate everyone who lives or cares for a baby this young.

Be sure to read our article on ways to prevent colds and flu. As pediatricians, we remind you to WASH HANDS, make sure your child eats healthy, gets enough sleep, and avoid crowds, when possible. As moms, we add that you might want to cook up a pot of good old-fashioned chicken soup to have on hand in case illness strikes your family.

Julie Kardos, MD and Naline Lai, MD
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Flu vaccine myth busters



Ben's runny nose, as depicted by Ben

The good news is that there was only a smattering of influenza (flu) cases across the United States over the summer. The great news is that according to the Centers for Disease Control, most of the detected strains are covered in this year's vaccine.

If you're still hesitant to vaccinate your family, let's talk frankly about some myths we sometimes hear about flu vaccines:

If my friend's child has flu symptoms, I'll just avoid their house to avoid catching the flu
False. According to the CDC , you are infectious the day before symptoms show up. So it is TOO LATE to avoid only those

already sick.

My family never gets the flu so it's not necessary to get the vaccine.
False and dangerous. Saying "My child and I have never had the flu so we don't need the flu vaccine" is like saying, "I've never a car accident so I won't wear my seat belt."

I got the flu shot last year and then I got sick. So the flu shot must have made me sick.
Our condolences. True, you were sick. **But this statement is False,** because the illness was not caused by the flu vaccine. Vaccines are not real germs, so you can't "get" a disease from the vaccine. But to your body, vaccine proteins appear very similar to real germs and your immune system will respond by making protection against the fake vaccine germ. When the real germ comes along, pow, your body already has the protection to fend off the real disease.

It is important to realize that the vaccine takes about 2 weeks to take effect in your body. So, if you were unlucky enough to be exposed to someone with the flu and then got the vaccine the next day, you still have a good chance of coming down with the flu. Unfortunately, the vaccine will not have had a chance to work yet.

Please know, however, there is a chance that for a couple days after a vaccine, you will ache and have a mild fever. The reason? Your immune system is simply revving up. But no, the flu vaccine does not give you the flu.

No one dies from the flu anymore, do they? Flu is just not that dangerous, so my child does not need a flu shot. I will just take my chances with flu.

False! A total of 107 influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported for the 2016-2017 season. In past seasons up to 90% of children who died from flu did not receive a flu

vaccine. So please, vaccinate yourself and your children.

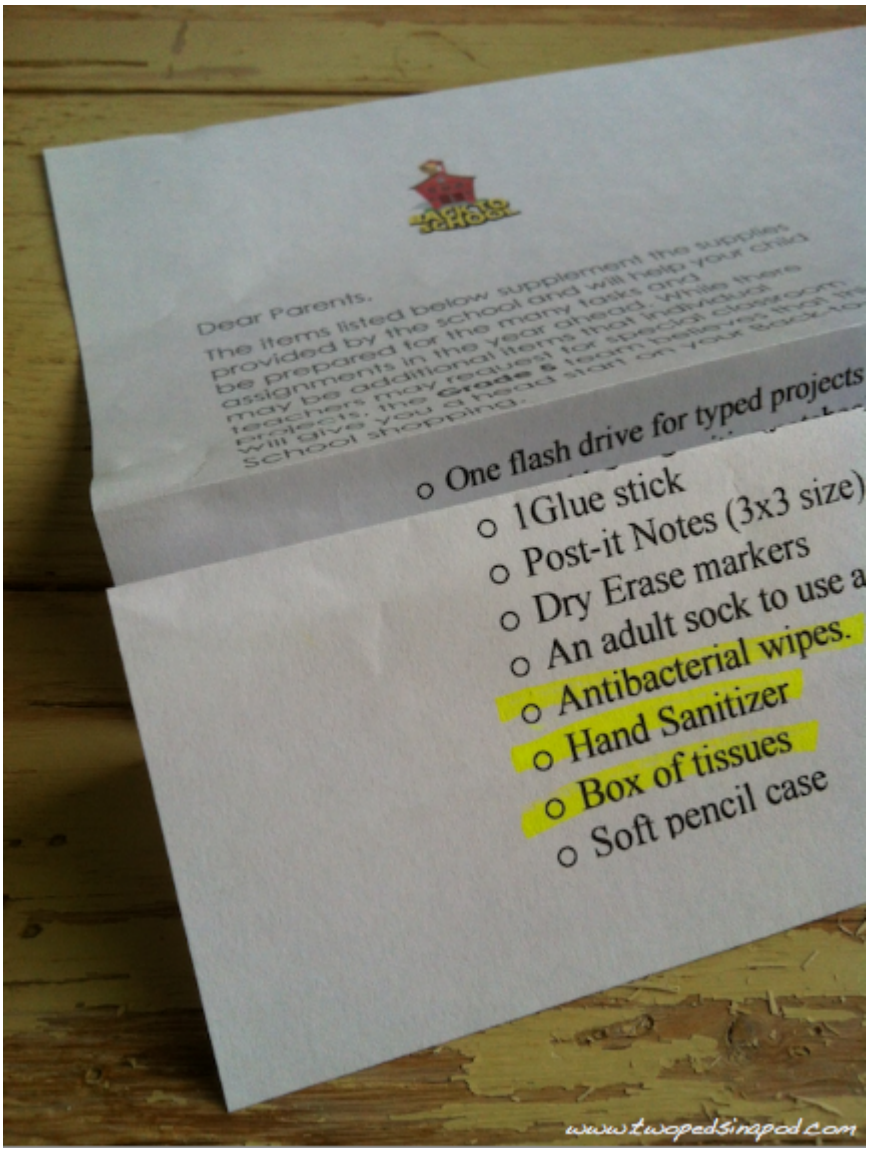
The vaccine coverage is awful.
Not the case this year. On the other hand, even if coverage was spotty, look at it this way– if half of the flu out there was covered, that's a lot fewer people that won't give your kid the flu.

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Flu vaccines: what you need to know for the 2014-2015 flu season



We gave our kids their back-to-school haircuts, donated their pants that fit like floods, and bought them new folders and notebooks. As shown on our back-to-school supply list photo, back-to-school also means the start of hand sanitizer and tissue season. Yes, it's time for your child's yearly flu vaccine. Even if you gave your child a flu vaccine last year, she'll need another one this season. Not only does the flu or influenza virus (not to be confused with "the stomach bug/stomach flu") usually come back every season in a slightly different form, but your child's immunity has waned over the past year. With every flu season, the Centers for Disease Control comes out with new recommendations. Here is a snap shot:

Who needs the flu vaccine?
All children aged 6 months or older, with a few exceptions discussed below, should receive a flu vaccine every year.

How many doses of flu vaccine does my child need this year?

If your child is nine years or older, your child only needs one dose this season.

If your child is younger than nine, your child only needs one dose this season **UNLESS**:

- This year will be the **first** time your child receives the flu vaccine. Then, she will need a second (booster) dose at least 4 weeks later.
- Your child skipped last year's flu vaccine. Then, she may need a booster dose this year. Check with your child's doctor.

Which type of flu vaccine is better, a shot or the mist (squirt in the nose)?

This year, the Centers for Disease Control suggests, if available, to give children aged 2-8 years the squirt in the nose. However, if the mist is unavailable, do not delay the vaccine. Give your child a flu shot instead. For older kids, the data is not as clear cut as to which vaccine works better to prevent the flu. Give your child either form of the vaccine.

Who cannot receive the mist?
Kids younger than 2 years; kids with certain medical conditions such as ongoing asthma (wheezing in the past year, or 2 through 4 years of age with asthma) and diabetes; kids undergoing aspirin therapy; kids who have had influenza antiviral therapy in the last 48 hours; kids with immune deficiencies; and kids around immunosupressed people who require a protective environment (e.g. around people hospitalized in a bone marrow transplant unit), should not receive the mist. **These kids should receive the injectable form of flu vaccine.** Your child's doctor can provide the complete list of contraindications.

Who should NOT receive any flu vaccine?
Babies younger than 6 months old and children with severe egg allergy (anaphylaxis) should not receive the flu vaccine.

Our office is slotted to receive our annual supply of flu

vaccine in the next few weeks. Our own families have learned to expect the annual flu vaccine with the start of each school year. Now we just need to convince them that they needed the haircuts.

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