PRESS RELEASE

21st December 2015

SCHOOL’S OUT BUT DO YOU NEED TO SWOT UP!

Those looking after children this Christmas are being urged to swot up on basic common illnesses such as coughs and colds so they know what to do should their child become ill.

With many GP surgeries closing over the festive period and winter illnesses on the rise, parent and carers are being asked to make sure they know how to deal common childhood illnesses likely to arise over the Christmas break.

Complaints such as ‘my throat hurts’ and ‘I can’t breathe’ are more than likely the sign of a cold. Children can get as many as 10 colds over winter. Symptoms include sneezing, a stuffy and/or runny nose, coughing, scratchy sore throat, and red, watery eyes. Other signs include chills, aches, a mild fever, and swollen lymph glands. Colds can be tough to spot in infants, so look for changes in breathing, eating, and sleeping patterns. The local pharmacy can advise on remedies to help.

Flu has symptoms such as a sudden fever, usually above 101°F (38°C), accompanied by chills and shakes, extreme fatigue, muscle aches, a hacking cough, nausea, and vomiting. If your child is under two its best to see a GP. If your usual practice is closed dial 111 to speak to the NHS. They can advise you where to go. However, most children between ages 2 and 4 will have had the flu vaccination which offers them the best protection.

Bronchitis can be indicated by difficulty breathing and a severe cough that may last several weeks. The child may also develop a slight fever that in severe cases will spike to above 102°F(39°C). Treatment for bronchitis is rest and fluids. A pharmacist can advise if you need to see a GP as well as help you choose over the counter remedies to help ease symptoms.

Asthma can also be triggered by cold weather. Best to stay indoors on very cold, windy days. If you do go out make sure the child is wearing a scarf over their nose and mouth. Be extra vigilant about them taking their regular medications, and keep rescue inhalers close by and in a warm place.

If you are worried about any symptoms speak to your pharmacist who can give expert medical advice on a range of minor ailments. Pharmacy First may be available in your area. It is for children aged from three months old who are registered with a GP, who are exempt from paying prescription charges. It means that those eligible don't have to pay for certain over-the-counter medicines. Instead they can see a qualified health professional at a pharmacy rather than make a GP appointment.
Keep illness at bay by making sure children wash their hands regularly, particularly after playing or going to the toilet, and before they eat food, will help to reduce the spread of germs and keep down instances of diarrhoea and vomiting or norovirus.

And in case anyone is struck down on Christmas Day make sure your medicine cabinet is well stocked. Your pharmacist can help you choose what you may need.

Dr Caroline Dollery, chair of Mid Essex CCG, said: “Christmas is a magical time for children and the last thing anyone wants is to be sitting in a waiting room. In most cases childhood illness can be managed at home with over the counter medication.

We’re advising parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles – all those that will look after children over Christmas – to make sure they’re stocked-up on medicines such as the child’s usual pain relief, oral rehydration solution and cough mixture. Check medicines are in date and always read the label. A suitable thermometer is usual too, to keep an eye on your child’s temperature.

“Should you require further advice there are different options available to you such as your local pharmacist, NHS 111 or www.nhs.uk. If your child needs more urgent medical attention please call your usual out-of-hours GP services, go to accident and emergency or dial 999.”

For more advice on staying well this winter www.nhs.uk/staywell

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