

We've all been there. The worst days of the year that seem to spring up right before the holidays when you have oodles to do and precious little time. Then your child comes home with some innocent sniffles that turn into the plague overnight. You're tired and worried and even more tired because you're worried. On top of it all, you've run out of vacation time at your job and the walk-in clinics are all bursting at the seams with contagious patients and impatient nurses. Yep, I hear you.

Last year, my youngest, my Polar Bear, was sent home from daycare with a slight fever and irritable disposition right before the holidays. His fever seemed to last forever and I took him to the doctor thinking he was teething. It turned out he had roseola without the spots. I had just started a new job and needed to take two weeks off without pay to help him through it. Then, a week later, both of my boys contracted something quite explosive that ended up with my antique, floral-print, velour couch to be basted with vomit.

The year before, my older son, Grizzly Bear, contracted hand foot and mouth disease twice. The second trip to the clinic was when the doctor informed me that you can get it multiple times and he has known some children to get it half a dozen times!

Needless to say, I'm not looking forward to this year's household epidemic. And here is how I'm preparing for it (and trying to prevent it):

Washing Hands Often

I know it's a bit overstated, but washing little hands and your own stops the spread of bacteria and viruses. You can always make a game out of it to make it fun for the tots. Personally, I get the foaming hand soap because it really interests my boys and helps them see what they are doing (scrubbing everywhere). The reason washing helps so much is because diseases are contagious before symptoms arrive. You may be talking to someone that appears and feels completely healthy but it turns out the pathogen is just incubating. Once they start to feel sick a few days later, they've already given it to you. So wash often!

To know when and how to properly wash your hands, click [here](#).

Getting Vaccinated

Vaccinations are weakened or dead forms of pathogens (or a pathogen's toxins). When they are introduced to your body, you begin to produce antibodies that coat the pathogen, neutralizing it and making it easier for white blood cells to break it down. Your white blood cells have memories so to speak, and so this helps when you are introduced a second time to the same pathogen. Each time you contract the same pathogen, it takes your white blood cells less and less time to fight the pathogen because they remember it and spit out the correct antibodies to coat and neutralize it. If you've never been introduced and the pathogen is alive and fully functioning, able to divide and conquer, your body will feel the full effect of the consequences.

Our bodies' immune systems keep up with the diseases that are circulating (like the cold) which is why the pathogen also changes slightly (mutates) during division so that it's harder to recognize. This is why the flu shot also changes each year and we have to keep updating our white blood cells' memories. The flu is much more deadly than the general public believes it to be. The vaccine that is created each year has the pathogens for the worst of the worst diseases that have historically wiped out parts of populations. It really is important to get your family vaccinated, even if it's heartbreaking to see the little ones get a needle. I find a little ice cream helps shoulder the pain.

For information on the vaccine, who in your family can get it (6 months or older), and where you can get it, click [here](#).

Keep Honey On Hand

It's good to keep fever reducers in the house even when no one is seemingly sick (I learned this the hard way after a 2 am trip to the 24 hr pharmacy to get baby Motrin) but it's also good to keep honey in the pantry. Honey has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. Some kinds of honey, particularly Manuka honey, are also antiviral. A couple of teaspoons to soothe a sore throat will be much appreciated by your little ones, and the taste is worth buzzing about!

To read up on some studies of the positive effects of honey and other natural remedies, click [here](#).

Know the Numbers

Health Link can be useful and you can reach qualified nurses by dialing their number, 811, during non-emergency scenarios. If you're a new mom or experienced, you may come across something where you're unsure if a trip to the doc is necessary. I've called 811 about half a dozen times and they've always been useful for contagious illnesses when you can see the symptoms, such as the cold and flu. For anything beyond that (such as your child not following developmental milestones or if diseases can be spread between your children and pets), not so much, but I do urge you to try as they may point out or ask about something you might have not noticed. Whatever your or your child's ailment is, they will always know whether you should go to see a doctor or not.

Always call 911 in an emergency.

These tricks may come in handy to prepare for, or hopefully prevent, any sick days your family might encounter. Although medications and natural remedies can help when you're feeling down, it's also worth noting that nothing actually makes you get better faster, they only cover up the signs and symptoms, so it's best to stay home and not infect others. The only thing that helps you and your children get better is time (and antibiotics if it's a bacterial infection).

So cuddle up together and watch some holiday movies. Nothing is better than baby snuggles and there are lots to go around when the young ones are having a sick day.