

What helps children with winter viruses? Like Flu, COVID, and all the others?

by Doug Puder, MD



I'm glad we had an office visit (or *TeleVisit*) for my child's winter cold. So I know my child is stable and doesn't need the hospital or emergency room. She is breathing fine and drinking fluids pretty well. Strep throat was ruled out so antibiotics won't help. She doesn't need *Tamiflu* (oseltamivir) because her *flu* test was negative. We are quarantined at home until we get the *COVID-19* test back. We try not to touch our eyes, mouth, or nose until we've washed washed our hands or used hand sanitizer (which we keep out of reach of young children.) But is there *anything* we can do to help her?

What can make sick children more comfortable?

We encourage acetaminophen (*tylenol*) or ibuprofen (*motrin* or *advil*) for fever or aches. You can give both if needed. We like saline nosedrops, a room humidifier or even some steam in the shower.

So why not try the OTC (over-the-counter) cold meds?

Because they have side effects and they can't be shown to work in any study. When these various *OTC* medications were tested against a teaspoon of honey, the honey won! Avoid "multi-symptom" products as children may receive the wrong *acetaminophen* dose.

The FDA has already taken a number of *OTC* medications off the market such as *phenylpropanolamine* and *ephedrine*. *Pseudoephedrine* (the ingredient in *Sudafed* and any product ending with *xxx-D*) can raise blood pressure. *Mucinex* (*Guaifenesin*) is advertised as an expectorant but has not been shown to be effective. The *FDA* recommends that *OTC* cough and cold medicines "not be given to children under 6 years old because of lack of effectiveness and potential for side effects". So don't be fooled by all the advertising!

What about a bit o' Honey?

We are not pushing honey, but it can give some relief. **Honey cannot be given to infants under age 12 months** (for risk of botulism), or those with allergy to bees. A teaspoon of honey at bedtime helped coughs more than *OTC* cough remedies. Why would honey work? It's soothing, tastes good, contains antioxidants.

Really!? Vitamin C, Zinc, Eldeberry don't work?

While too little *Vitamin C* causes a disease called scurvy, high dose *Vitamin C* doesn't make illness milder or shorter. Studies show no benefit from *zinc* or *eldeberry* either. Long term *zinc* use can lead to copper deficiency. *Eldeberry* is a source of antioxidants but can be poisonous (cyanide) if not thoroughly cooked. A one-a-day vitamin, glass of juice, or fruit, *sure*. But no megavitamins!

What About Chicken Soup or Hot Tea?

Chicken soup did help soothe kids in research studies. It helped nasal congestion, and had a mild anti-inflammatory effect. (My grandma made the best chicken soup, just sayin'.) Hot tea helped to thin mucus and ensure proper hydration of the body. Green and black teas are filled with flavonoids, which are potent antioxidants. Good if kids like it, but don't force them.