

Health Tips for Parents

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How can I protect my child from getting the enterovirus that causes respiratory illness?

A recent outbreak in respiratory illness caused by the enterovirus (EV-D68) can cause a range of symptoms in children, from mild to serious.

The enterovirus can be found in an infected person's respiratory secretions, such as saliva, nasal mucus or sputum and likely spreads from person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes or touches a surface that is then touched by others.



"Few people who contract EV-D68 develop symptoms other than a runny nose and a cough," says Carlos Lerner, MD, medical director of UCLA's Children's Health Center. In general, infants, children and teenagers are most likely to get infected and become ill. Adults can get infected with enteroviruses, but they are more likely to have no symptoms or mild symptoms. Children with asthma may have a higher risk for severe respiratory illness.

Diagnosis and Treatment EV-D68 can only be diagnosed through specific lab tests on specimens taken from the nose and throat.

Many hospitals and some doctor's offices can test ill patients to see if they have enterovirus infection, but most cannot do specific testing to determine the type of enterovirus, such as EV-D68. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that clinicians only consider EV-D68 testing for patients with severe respiratory illness and when the cause is unclear.

No specific treatment exists other than taking over-the-counter medications for pain and fever to relieve mild symptoms and allowing the infection to run its course, which usually lasts a few days. People with severe respiratory illness may need to be hospitalized.

Anyone with respiratory illness should contact their doctor if they are having difficulty breathing or if their symptoms worsen. "To help avoid getting and spreading the virus, everyone should practice safe hand hygiene, avoid contact with sick people, and keep their surroundings clean and disinfected," says Dr. Lerner.



Symptoms

- Mild symptoms may include fever, runny nose, sneezing, cough and body and muscle aches.
- Severe symptoms may include wheezing and difficulty breathing.
- In rare cases, enterovirus infections can lead to paralysis and infections of the brain (encephalitis) and heart (myocarditis).



Preventative Care

"Although there is no vaccine against Enterovirus D68, parents looking to protect their children against other serious respiratory illnesses this winter are encouraged to have their children vaccinated against the flu," advises Dr. Lerner.

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