- Infants—diseases

FIVE NURSERY BUGS & HOW TO BEAT THEM

CAMILLA FOSTER TAKES A CLOSER LOOK AT COMMON ILLNESSES CHILDREN CAN PICK UP

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NEW research suggests toddlers and pre-schoolers are likely to get 15 illnesses in their first year of nursery, but they will be more resilient to bugs when they start school. Experts from UCL – alongside colleagues from the University of Cambridge, Cornell University and North Middlesex University Hospital – found that during their first year of formal childcare, babies and children are expected to have 12 respiratory illnesses such as coughs and colds, two episodes of diarrhoea and/or vomiting illness, and at least one illness that involves a rash. Consultant paediatrician Dr Arindam Das highlights five common bugs and offers advice on how to treat them.



1. Coughs & cold

“The most common infections that children pick up at nursery are coughs, colds, and fever,” says Dr

Das. Most colds in younger children get better within two weeks.

What to do: The NHS recommends making sure that your child drinks plenty of fluids and suggests asking a pharmacist or GP for saline nasal drops to help relieve a stuffy nose. “Good hand hygiene is the most effective measure to prevent a lot of these infections because they spread via droplets and touch,” adds Dr Das. “So, teaching children to wash their hands and to cover their mouth and nose when they’re coughing and sneezing is really important.”

2. Fever

“Parents are often worried about fever, but a fever in itself is not a red flag,” says Dr Das. “You need to look at the whole picture. A fever is a sign or a symptom that the child is fighting a bug.”

What to do: If your child or baby has a high temperature, you can usually look after them at home as it should return to normal within one to four days, the NHS advises. However, call 111 or your GP surgery if your child has other signs of illness, if the high temperature has lasted five days or more, or if they don’t want to eat or are dehydrated.

3. TUMMY BUGS

“We also see a lot of tummy bugs in nursery school-age children,” says Dr Das. “The most common scenario is vomiting and then after a few days diarrhoea usually starts.”

What to do: “Tummy bugs can usually be managed at home safely if the child is otherwise well and is eating and drinking normally,” says Dr Das. “Make sure your child is wellhydrated. Calpol and Brufen can make them feel more comfortable if needed, however, seek help if the child is becoming very drowsy, or lethargic, or are not drinking enough, or are passing very little urine.”

The NHS recommends calling 111 if a child under five years has signs of dehydration, if they keep being sick and cannot keep fluid down, if they have bloody diarrhoea or bleeding from the bottom, have diarrhoea for more than seven days or vomiting for more than two days.

4. Hand, foot & mouth disease

“Normally, the child will have a mild to moderate temperature,” says Dr Das. “The other hallmark symptom is rashes on the hand, foot or mouth. These will be blanching, so when you are pressing it should fade away and the child should be well in between the fever.”

What to do: Drink cool fluids to soothe the mouth and prevent dehydration. Eat soft foods such as yoghurt and avoid hot, salty and spicy foods. Call your GP if symptoms don’t improve in seven to 10 days.

5. Chickenpox

Dr Das says: “Chickenpox is usually a self-resolving condition, but rashes can be extremely itchy and distressing for a child.” What to do: “You can use Calpol or some antihistamines in an age-appropriate dose if it is really itchy. However, if the rash is getting very yellowy, there’s pus or bleeding, the child needs to be seen by a GP.”

The NHS recommends calling 111 for advice if your child has chickenpox and is showing signs of dehydration, such as fewer wet nappies.

When to keep children off school?

Standard guidelines for vomiting or diarrhoea advise parents not to send a child to school or nursery until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped. Dr Das adds: “If a child is coughing and sneezing actively, I would advise keeping them away from nursery.”