

Safe ways to relieve your young child's flu symptoms

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Medications not intended for children younger than 4, expert says.

(HealthDay)—Flu season is especially bad in the United States this year, and young children with the flu tend to suffer more than others because they can't take over-the-counter medications to help relieve their symptoms.

Cough and [cold medications](#) can have serious side effects if taken by young children, including [rapid heart rate](#) and convulsions.

"These medications should never be used by children under the age of 4 and only under a physician's supervision if under the age of 6," Dr. Bridget Boyd, a pediatrician and assistant professor of pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine, said in a university news release.

Unable to use medications, parents may feel helpless. But there are ways they can safely relieve their children's [flu symptoms](#), Boyd said.

Children 3 months to 12 months old should be given warm, clear fluids such as water, [apple juice](#) and an oral [electrolyte solution](#) such as Pedialyte. Children who are 1 year old can be given a half to a full teaspoon of honey, which is a natural cough suppressant that helps thin secretions. Children older than 6 years can be given cough drops.

Children of all ages can get relief from a warm mist humidifier or exposure to steam from a shower, Boyd added.

"The best way to protect yourself and your family from the [flu](#) is a flu shot. The vaccine provides protection from three different strains of influenza," she said. "It is possible for you to become ill with the flu more than once a season, so just because you had the flu doesn't mean you can't get sick again."

Along with the flu shot, correct [hand washing](#) is another effective way to prevent the spread of the flu. Boyd said parents and children should:

- Wet hands with clean running water and apply soap. Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub between fingers, under rings and under fingernails.
- Continue to rub hands for 20 seconds, which is the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice. Rinse hands well under running water and dry them using a clean towel or let them air-dry.
- If it isn't possible to wash hands with soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Rub it into your hands until they're dry.

Flu patients should try to cough into a tissue. If that's not possible, cough into your flexed arm at the elbow. This will help reduce the spread of flu germs.

"Remember, antibiotics do not stop or limit viral infections such as the flu," Boyd said. "If you suspect your child has the flu, talk to your pediatrician about medications that lessen the symptoms and shorten the duration of the illness."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [children, the flu and the flu vaccine](#).

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