

How to Protect Your Kids Amid a Surge in Respiratory Viruses

ER doctor Mike Silverman shares emergency-room updates and tips for keeping your kids healthy.

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Respiratory infections are on the rise in the D.C. region and across the country—a surge that is [overwhelming children’s hospitals](#) and pediatric units. With flu, RSV and Covid all active simultaneously, some health experts foresee a “tripledemic” this winter.

For parents who are already concerned about their children’s health as the coronavirus pandemic drags on, the spike in hospitalizations may be alarming. Mike Silverman, chair of emergency medicine at VHC Health, has recommendations for keeping kids healthy. The physician, a [2021 Best of Arlington winner](#) for “Covid straight talk,” has shared [Friday Night Updates](#) from the emergency room since the beginning of the pandemic. Lately, those updates have centered on the uptick in respiratory viruses.

VHC Health (formerly Virginia Hospital Center) is seeing an overall increase in infections across all age groups, Silverman tells *Arlington Magazine*. At the moment, the hospital is treating more patients with flu, he says, noting that flu season seems to be arriving early.

“It’s very unusual for patients to get admitted for flu. ... The kids who come in with RSV are more likely to require hospitalization than kids with influenza,” Silverman says. “That’s where part of the challenge is going forward: How does the entire healthcare system take care of the children that are going to require advanced

care in a hospital, whether it's in the pediatric intensive care unit or in a regular hospital bed, for the potential number of patients we think might require hospitalization in the coming weeks and months?"

RSV, short for respiratory syncytial virus, causes infections in the respiratory tract and tends to hit young children and older adults the hardest. Infants and toddlers may need to be on oxygen treatments and require "more aggressive therapy" to help them breathe, Silverman says. Kids' heightened susceptibility to the virus may be a result of decreased exposure to viruses altogether during the pandemic, he says.



The triple threat of flu, RSV and Covid is straining area hospitals. (Photo by Hush Naidoo Jade Photography)

"Normally, kids have numerous infections throughout the year to develop their own immunity. And there's been much less interaction with other kids ... where kids normally get that exposure," he explains. "So when you look at someone who's born during the pandemic, they probably had little opportunity to get the routine colds that other kids get."

But he warns that now is not the time to cast off masks and other health precautions in an effort to build a child's immunity. "There's a lot of RSV out there, there's a lot of flu. In the big picture, now is the time to be more protective."

So what can parents do to help keep their kids stay healthy? Heed these doctor recommendations:

How to Best Protect Your Kids

1. Get the flu vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends an annual shot for everyone age 6 months or older. (Find a flu shot provider near you [with this online tool](#).)
2. Make sure every eligible person in your household also gets a Covid booster.

3. Wash hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
4. Avoid touching your eyes, hands or mouth with unwashed hands. Parents should also avoid touching their child's face with unwashed hands.
5. Avoid close contact with people who are ill. Try to isolate anyone in your household who is sick.
6. Don't share utensils or have close contact with people who have cold-like symptoms.
7. Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze with your arm or a tissue.
8. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, such as doorknobs, mobile devices and toys.
9. Keep your kids home from school if they are sick.