

## **Tripledemic Tactics**

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Every year Merriam-Webster adds new words to the dictionary, often those that have made their way into everyday language and pop culture.

While it's not officially on the list, the term "tripledeemic" is certainly a strong contender. The word was coined to describe the near simultaneous increase in COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, cases. Millions across the country have been getting sick at an alarming rate earlier than normal, particularly for flu, putting increased pressure on health care systems across the country.

Young children, those under two-years-old, are particularly susceptible to RSV, as well as those with other chronic health conditions. Children typically develop anything from cold-like symptoms to a more severe cough or even trouble breathing.

Dr. Keith Hanson, a pediatrician with Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois, says RSV is doing what RSV has done for decades, but we have become a little bit complacent because kids weren't really sick for the last couple years due to COVID-19 lockdowns, limitations and mask-wearing.

"It definitely is more severe than other years, more patients, but every three to four years we kind of have a busy year anyway, whether it's from RSV or flu or other viruses. So it's not unusual by a five-year trend to have a lot more patients," says Dr. Hanson.

One of the challenges from an infectious disease perspective is that what may start as RSV or the flu, whether it be a child or an adult, can get a lot worse because of secondary bacterial infections.

"So the bacteria is taking advantage of going down to deep in your lungs. Going to the sterile sites better – ears, sinuses and other soft tissues. You don't think that the viral infection(s) are only some of the problem but the complications are also the problem," explains Dr. Mustafa Bakir with OSF HealthCare.

As a pediatric infectious disease specialist, Dr. Bakir wants to reassure parents that – for the most part – they should not be overly concerned about the increase in cases of COVID-19, flu and RSV in kids, unless their child has other conditions that affect their immune system.

But both he and Dr. Hanson agree parents DO need to be attentive to any symptoms their child might have because there isn't a magic pill that can cure any of them.

"It's not like an antibiotic you can take and be better in two or three days, they may shorten your illness, maybe a little bit less severe, but it's not going to make you feel a lot better very quickly or necessarily prevent transmission. There's not much we can do for all these viral illnesses besides supportive care and contain the spread," says Dr. Hanson. "Do they have a fever or trouble breathing? Or are they not drinking enough? Those are the same kind of things that you would have watched for anytime. And it's the same now. So even though these things are in the news, we are seeing more cases, the average person, especially if you don't have any other medical conditions, doesn't have to do anything that you would be doing otherwise as a parent and just kind of watch out for those common things."

With the winter respiratory season far from over, and in the wake of holiday get-togethers and travel, and with schools set to get back into session, a few of the COVID-era prevention strategies that have fallen by the wayside are recommended by both doctors.

Dr. Bakir stresses "Don't go to public places if you're sick, if your kid is sick. Don't take your kid to public places. This is going to protect your kid as well. He needs to be a home and take some rest. And sanitation of your hands. Please, please use a mask. It's a very simple, cheap and very effective way to prevent the disease."

Adds Dr. Hanson: "Vaccination can't be emphasized enough for influenza, for COVID, if eligible depending on the age. Unfortunately there isn't one for RSV, though. It's been under researched for many years. The benefits of vaccination greatly outweigh the risks, not just for yourself, because it's going to reduce transmission, reduces various illness, but also preventing continued spread in our communities."

If your child or any family member is running a high fever or is having difficulty breathing, you are encouraged to contact your primary care physician or seek urgent/emergency care if necessary. OSF HealthCare has also established a remote monitoring program for infants and toddlers with RSV through [OSF OnCall Digital Health](#).