

## 8 ways to help kids dodge germs

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(HealthDay)—There are a number of ways parents can help give a boost to their child's immune system, a family doctor suggests.

"The immune system helps us fight infections," said Dr. Palak Shroff, a family medicine specialist at University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center.

"Immunity develops over time, so the more someone gets exposed, the more the immune system develops," Shroff explained in a center news release.

"Kids' whole environment is new, but over time, their immunity will develop and get better," she added.

Shroff suggested eight keys to helping children minimize their risk of catching every cold and virus that comes their way:

- **Breast-feeding is the first step.** It is an important way to help your child develop a strong immune system. "During breast-feeding, the mother's immunity transfers to the child," Shroff said.
- **Vaccination is another crucial factor.** Receiving all recommended vaccines prevents kids from catching potentially dangerous illnesses, such as whooping cough, measles, mumps, hepatitis and chicken pox. "All children over 6 months of age should get a flu shot. Sometimes small [kids](#) get the flu and that develops into pneumonia, then they struggle to get better for a long time," Shroff noted.
- **Offer kids a healthy diet.** Parents should make sure children receive balanced meals with lots of fruits and vegetables. These foods contain antioxidants, vitamins and minerals that are essential for the [immune system](#).
- **Kids need sufficient sleep.** If children aren't well-rested, their bodies lose their natural defense mechanisms and have a tougher time fighting off illness, Shroff said.
- **Physical activity is also important.** Getting plenty of exercise

promotes better blood circulation. This helps the lungs and heart work better, which boosts immunity, she added.

- **Teach children good hygiene.** Remembering to wash their hands and cover their coughs are simple habits that even young [children](#) should be encouraged to develop.
- **Protect kids from cigarette smoke.** Like any allergen, secondhand smoke will harm a child's immunity. Kids who are exposed to [cigarette smoke](#) on a regular basis tend to develop respiratory infections.
- **Avoid overuse of antibiotics.** When these drugs are overused, bacteria can develop resistance to them. So when your child catches a bacterial illness that would normally be treated with an antibiotic, the treatment may not work. It's best to let most viral illnesses run their course, Shroff advised.

**More information:** SOURCE: University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center, news release, Feb. 3, 2017

The American Academy of Pediatrics has more about [healthy living for kids](#).

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