

When does your child's flu merit an ER visit?

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(HealthDay)—It's hard not to worry when your child suffers from the flu, but pediatricians say too many parents are taking their sick kids to the emergency room when a doctor's visit would suffice.

"We are seeing a jump in the number of patients coming to our [emergency department](#) for flu-like symptoms," said Dr. Michele Walsh, medical director of the Pediatric Emergency Department at Vanderbilt University's Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital, in Nashville, Tenn.

The [hospital](#) has had 30% more emergency department visits in recent weeks compared to the same period in 2018.

"What we are finding is that the majority of these visits could have been averted," Walsh said in a hospital news release. "Many of them don't need to be admitted to the hospital and probably would have been best served by their pediatricians, in walk-in clinics or urgent care facilities. We want to provide optimal care for the families in our community, but sometimes emergency departments shouldn't be considered the first stop."

"It is always best to call your pediatrician to discuss symptoms," she added. "They should be the first line of defense because they are most familiar with the patient and will be able to direct parents to the best place to receive care."

Walsh outlined when children with flu-like symptoms should be taken to the emergency department. They should be brought in if they have:

- difficulty breathing or distress,
- dehydration,
- severe headache or spinal neck pain,
- [high fever](#) that causes a change in behavior.

"This year's flu season has come early, and it's interesting that influenza B [a springtime virus] is our most common strain," said Dr. Buddy Creech, director of the Vanderbilt Vaccine Research Program.

"Now is the time to make sure everyone in the family is vaccinated so that we can protect ourselves, each other and those around us who can't be vaccinated because of cancer or other problems with their immune systems," Creech said.

To reduce the spread of the flu and colds, Vanderbilt doctors advise people to: wash hands frequently; cover your mouth when coughing and sneezing; wear a mask when you have signs of illness, and stay home when sick.

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

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