Common Cold And Flu Related Myths Busted

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Flu and other viruses are wreaking havoc on people's busy lives. Many people are wondering if some cold myths are true in desperate hope to keep viruses at bay.

Dr. Andrew Bonwit, pediatric infectious disease expert at Loyola University Health System, addresses 10 of the most common notions concerning colds and flu.

If I go outside with my hair wet I'll catch a cold: Fiction

"Colds come from viruses, not from wet hair. It's probably not a good idea to get chilled so it's best to dress appropriately when heading outside in the cold," Bonwit said.

Flu vaccines cause the flu: Fiction

"The flu shot is an inactive form of the virus, so it is impossible to get the flu from the flu shot. There may be some minor reactions, usually muscle soreness at the injection site. The nasal drop does contain the live virus and so is not recommended for vulnerable patients. Still, the chances of getting the flu from the nasal drop are very slight," Bonwit said.

If I don't vomit, I didn't have the flu: Fiction

"Influenza can cause vomiting and diarrhea, but not always. Influenza is mainly a respiratory illness. It is possible to have a stomach virus but that is not influenza," Bonwit said.

Feed a cold and starve the flu: Not really

"The most important thing is to make sure you are well hydrated and eating as well of a balanced diet as you can. Don't force feed yourself or your child when ill, but try to get plenty of fluids and some electrolytes such as sodium and potassium. Good sources are crackers, bananas, soups and fruit juices," Bonwit said.

Chicken soup helps cure a cold: Some Fact
"Limited evidence shows that chicken soup might be helpful in fighting a cold. A small study has shown that it may help reduce the inflammatory response in your respiratory tract when you're sick and probably improves airflow and hydration. In any case it couldn't hurt," Bonwit said.

Viruses can survive on surfaces for hours: Fact

"The length a virus can survive depends on the type of virus. The flu virus can live for 8-12 hours on hard surfaces such as countertops and stainless steel sinks. On soft surfaces, such as cloth, it won't live very long. Still, it is extremely important to practice good hand hygiene. If someone in your home is sick, be sure to clean all hard surfaces with appropriate household disinfects, like diluted bleach or disinfectant cleaning wipes often."

If I get a cold or the flu, vitamin C will help me get better faster: Fact and Fiction

"Some people think taking extra large doses of vitamin C will help them get better faster. This probably isn't true since your body most likely won't absorb that much of the extra vitamin C. Though some people swear by it, mega dosing isn't likely to help. Admittedly, it probably won't cause harm. You can find some benefit from consuming vitamin C naturally through normal supplement doses or eating fruits with lots of vitamin C, especially citrus fruits, and other fruits and vegetables such as onions. No guarantee it will make you better faster, but may help some, and it can't hurt," Bonwit said.

Taking zinc will make my cold go away faster: Some Fact

"There is some mixed evidence. Limited studies have shown that throat lozenges with zinc have helped. Other zinc remedies, such as the nasal swabs, caused negative side effects such as people losing their sense of smell. Throat lozenges, with zinc or not, help relieve throat pain so whether or not they help you get better faster, they will help relieve a sore throat. Just don't give them to a child under the age of 5 as they can be a choking hazard," Bonwit said.

Sleep is one of the most important things for kids with a virus: Fact

"Sleep is extremely important to help kids fight a virus. If they are sick, let them sleep. Just make sure they don't have difficulty being awakened as this could be a sign of something more serious. Watch to make sure they are breathing normally. If not, call your doctor," Bonwit said.

After three days my child is no longer contagious: Depends on the virus

"Every virus is different and how long a person is contagious can depend on the person as well as the virus. A child with influenza is usually contagious for about a week," Bonwit said.

"I know it sounds old fashioned, but one of the best ways to prevent viral illness is thoroughly washing your hands, especially before and after you eat. Also, if you need to cough or sneeze do it into a tissue and throw it away. Then, immediately wash your hands. If a tissue isn't available cough or sneeze into your elbow, this will limit the spread of germs," Bonwit added.