

Nurse News

Holidays and Health Concerns

This time of year often offers an increased number of activities and social situations families experience during the holidays. Additional dangers exist for sufferers of asthma, allergies, and other respiratory problems.

With Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukkah come hello hugs and close contact that can help the spread of respiratory viruses. Therefore, if you or your student has a cold, use good judgment about close physical contact and remember that **hand washing** is the most important means of preventing infection and illnesses. And the new trend is to cough or sneeze *completely* into your elbow (sleeve), **not** your hands.

This time of year it is also important to dress appropriately and cover your bare skin in the cold temperatures. Just because one is going from the car to the building doesn't mean that a coat isn't necessary to have. Being prepared for emergencies, whether your car breaks down between point A and point B or you become stranded outside, winter gear is necessary to prevent hypothermia or frostbite.

People with viral illnesses or asthma can also be affected by cold winter air. Encourage them to breathe through their nose instead of their mouth and to cover their nose and mouth with scarves to keep cold air out of the airways, and to prevent the onset of respiratory problems. Also keep in mind that people with allergies may be exposed to second-hand smoke, and fireplace smoke, as well as other irritating odors, such as cologne or perfumes at family gatherings.

Christmas trees, chemicals sprayed on trees, and molds can trigger allergic reactions. An allergic reaction usually occurs shortly after an encounter with the allergen. Sometimes, ornaments that have been boxed away for a year can harbor dust mites and molds. These are transferred to hands and into the respiratory system, triggering attacks. Be sure you and your student wash their hands thoroughly after unpacking decorations.

For people with severe food allergies, food preparation can be a problem. It is a good idea, if you are having dinner at someone else's home, to let your host or hostess know of any allergies well beforehand. Always bring your medications with you so you can be ready in case of an emergency.

Use good common sense and choices during the holiday break. Staying up late, eating junk food, and getting excited can also trigger asthma attacks and lower one's immune system. When normal schedules are not being followed, it is even more important to monitor activities for students with chronic illnesses.

The holidays are a festive time. Please increase your student's chances of staying healthy by planning ahead, being prepared for emergencies, and taking extra precautions.

Happy Holidays!
Nurse Annette