

Unfortunately you can't put your kids in a bubble. Welcome to SBH Bronx Health Talk produced by SBH Health System and Broadcast from the beautiful studio at St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx, I'm Steven Clark. Chicken pox and Measles, Mumps and Fifth Disease, Ear Infections and Pinkeye, Croup and Whooping cough Coxsackie virus and Kawasaki Disease, children are susceptible to more viral and bacterial infections and allergic and immunological diseases than you can ever imagine. With us today to discuss childhood diseases and infections is Doctor Tsohline Kojaoghlanian who from now on we'll call Dr. K, and Dr. K is a pediatric infectious disease specialist at SBH Health System, welcome.

Thanks for having me Steve

So first of all, why are children susceptible in so many different diseases?

So children's immune system in the first few years of life is underdeveloped. It doesn't reach the adult levels of maturity until at least two years of age. So specifically the first two years of life are when children are most susceptible to infections, where in adults our immune system would be able to handle it, however in kids it may really affect them more significantly.

I've always wondered, I know when my kids were little, the question was do we expose them to kids or don't we, we keep them in a bubble, what's best you know for the future?

Of course we cannot keep them in a bubble, on the contrary all the trends are all towards globalization, more socialization, and therefore we will be interacting much more with each other. And it's the close interaction also in addition to their poor immune system that puts certain children at risk, especially those children who attend daycare and therefore they are sharing each other's mucus, each other's saliva, each other's secretory, even poop and pee if you like, because obviously you cannot teach a two-year-old how to wash their hands. So what we should be doing as adults to try to prevent as much as possible highly contagious or transmissible diseases is for us to pay attention to these things, and the first and most common thing to do is a good hand hygiene, basically washing our hands with soap and water before and after handling any young child, before preparing their food, and after before and after changing their diaper. Those simple measures that we may not think about because it's so common sense is really what would prevent a lot of infections especially, in as I said closed environments. Another thing in daycare settings and schools that might help and most schools have adopted I hope, is cleaning the doorknobs, cleaning the toys, cleaning the computer, keyboards that the kids are using on a daily basis. And that also is another way of preventing infections especially those that can sit on those objects for a long time.

Is something like daycare good in the long run for a child as far as building their immune system?

That's actually a very interesting question. You have a

school that says the more you expose them and the earlier you expose them, that actually builds their immune system and I tend to believe in that to a certain extent obviously. So therefore again you want to prevent severe infections as much as possible, and you want to make sure that the child is not going to stay at home, and therefore indirectly affect the parents' productivity because if you don't have a child care at home then the parent has to stay home from work and etc. etc. so it becomes a vicious cycle. However yes we also don't want to keep the kids completely isolated we do want them to be exposed to different stimuli, whether good or bad stimuli because yes that is a way to build their immune system as well. So the answer to your question is daycare is a necessity of our modern life, it's not gonna go away anytime soon, therefore again it's up to us adults to try our best to prevent the spread of infection from one child to the other in those settings.

I know I remember years ago as a young father, if we had friends or they had kids who came over to the house and God forbid they had a cold; it was like you know what?, open the windows, you know keep our kids away from them! In hindsight was that like over the top?

Well to be honest the window opening is not gonna really prevent the spread of disease. It has been shown that most of these viruses or bacteria to be transmitted from one person to the other. It is close contact that's what leads to the infection, specifically three feet is the distance that we talk about. So even if you open that window, if your son played with the your friend's son, within three feet

of each other then whatever window you open or even if you were in the outdoor space that was bound to happen. So again the idea is that, yes we want to make sure that our kids live a healthy life they are outdoors people, they are especially this day and age you know most kids are already tending to be isolated on their phones, and screen time on the contrary we want them to go out and play in the dirt, and touch each other, and interact with each other and teach them when they come home, how to wash their hands, how to cough within their sleeve or sneeze within their sleeve not to touch their face or put their hands in their mouth after touching something else so basic things we can teach them when they're in the teachable age that can help prevent the spread of infections and another way to prevent those that cannot prevent by hand-washing so for example those infections that are airborne such as measles that can lead to severe complications is a vaccine and that's why we advocate as well that vaccines are an important part of preventing not the simple codes we're not interested in to prevent those we're interested in preventing severe infections that can lead to debilitating complications.

Specifically what diseases are you talking about now?

In the first couple of years of life where I already mentioned their immune system is weak we need to help them battle the most severe of infections so for example those that cause pertussis which is whooping cough those that can cause meningitis which is infection of the covering of the brain those that can cause measles mumps and

chickenpox those are the ones that we advocate to vaccinate against.

Are you getting pushback are you seeing a pushback from parents when it comes to vaccines in the Bronx?

In our experience our parents are very smart when it comes to protecting their children and in the vast majority of the cases they understand that that is for the benefit of their children and not just their children but their community and even their own parents because there is such a thing called as herd immunity so when you vaccinate kids you also indirectly protect their grandparents so we have been happy with our parents and the communication and the trust we have built in between the SBH community and the parents we serve and we rarely have to struggle when it comes to that particular service we provide.

Are you finding there certain childhood illnesses that are endemic to the Bronx?

Not really these diseases tend to be a common geographically mostly because of the weather so what you find here might be different than what you find in California or North Carolina because they have certain ticks that we don't have but no there aren't anything there isn't any specific infection and then make to the Bronx that that is specific to the population that we are serving.

I know in addition to be an infectious disease specialist

obviously your pediatrician as well when do you bring a child to see a doctor?

So in the winter obviously that is a very important issue right and a certain daycares and schools have their a set of rules as to when they want a child be kept at home if they are sick and unfortunately we are not always on the same page meaning pediatricians and daycares and schools are not always on the same page as to who should stay home and who should return to school if we were thinking in the absolute strict terms a child who should be kept home from school or daycare certain situations which are if the child cannot participate in the normal activities of the day so for example is not able to focus on the homework is not able to run in recess that child should stay home if the child is in daycare and the daycare doesn't have enough staffing to take care of that ill child and take care of the other children that's another reason for the patient to be home and the third last but not least is if that patients infection is deemed highly contagious so for example a patient with measles should stay home for seven days a patient with tuberculosis that contagious cannot go to school for a certain period of time so the idea that any child with a fever or any child with a pinkeye or any child with limited infection localized infection should stay home is not really what we advocate for but we understand that the daycare workers want to cover their end and don't want to have any parents yelling at them about why did you have allowed this child in and made my child sick as well so there's a very fine line we usually say that if a child has high fever with a sore throat

that's a patient who should be seen by the doctor because we want to make sure that that kid does not have strep throat which is easily diagnosed and easily treated another situation where kids should be seen by their doctor is if they have a high fever plus a generalized rash because again in the case of unusual generalized whole body rashes we want to make sure that it is not a contagious infection but most kids with fever who can still function take a Tylenol go to school sorry and do their homework and come back they should be sent to school and most kids with pinkeye which is not swollen which is not copiously having discharge that cannot be controlled can also go to school and kids with diarrhea if they are not incontinent if or if they are in diapers but the but the poop is not coming out of the diapers they can also be sent to school again as I said we don't always agree with the daycares stricter guidelines when it comes to this but we try our best to educate our parents about what to do in these situations so that they don't have to lose a day of work as well or find childcare for their kid who just has a simple fever.

Do you find in this community that parents tend to bring their children to the doctors too early or too late?

As I said earlier I think that our community is very smart most parents have a very good instinct about when their child is sick enough to be seen by a doctor versus when they can manage the situation at home hopefully all of the pediatricians in the community are educating the parents as to what are the bad signs or red flags to look for to

bring the kids to the doctor's attention so in that sense we are good however unfortunately we also live in a community where most parents and are working during the day and the only time they can take care of that of their sick children is in the evening and so they end up going to the emergency room instead if instead of coming to the pediatricians office but that's something that you know is a universal problem that and sometimes the emergency room gets over flooded with cases that are not emergencies.

Yeah I understand I also as I mentioned we did another podcast on the flu and that's something that's in your wheel house too I'm sure and I guess because very young children can't get the flu shot I guess up to six months old I am assuming you really suggest very strongly that parents do get that shot so they don't pass on the flu to their children right?

Yes, so influenza virus is not as common as the common cold so you can actually live your whole lifetime and not catch the flu virus but you would be a lucky person if you unfortunately have the bad luck of catching the influenza virus then you will never forget it because the fever the muscle pain the the headache the soreness associated with it I'm told is unforgettable so therefore a parent should be educated about the difference between the common cold and the influenza or the flu and we are vaccinating against the flu virus specifically which as I described can be pretty severe and in those under five years of age it can put them in the hospital and even lead to their death

similarly pregnant women obese kids and asthmatic kids are at high risk for of the complications from influenza therefore if you do have a vaccine available that's very safe and can prevent this infection in the very young or the very vulnerable why not so we highly advocate that these parents get on board with the vaccine it is frustrating that we have to vaccinate every single year and scientists and doctors are working very hard to find a universal vaccine that will last for a lifetime but until that day comes we suggest that especially that high-risk patients but everybody else the grandparent of the two-month-old baby who cannot get vaccinated the babysitter the daycare centers all get vaccinated and indirectly protect the very young and the vulnerable from the disease.

I know years ago again when my kids were young and my daughter in particular had some asthmatic issues and every time we brought her to the doctor we said we'll give her an antibiotic that'll make a difference it seems to really relieve the problem today they're not so quick to give you antibiotics right how do you feel about that?

That's a topic that is something that I would love to speak about at length with you Steve because I hope the community realizes that resistance to antibiotics is an urgent matter not only in the United States but worldwide I'm just gonna give you an example when I was training about 15 years ago we used to treat simple urinary tract infections with amoxicillin I'm sure everybody's familiar with that antibiotic that was the go-to agent to treat 99% of simple UTIs today you cannot use amoxicillin to treat a

UTI because the organisms bacteria that cause UTI have developed resistance to amoxicillin therefore we have to use a bigger stronger antibiotic to treat a simple UTI and the reason for that is because we abused and overused and misused amoxicillin and therefore we lost that medication completely to treat a simple urinary tract infection so hopefully this kind of gives you an idea of what man my answer is going to be to treat people with antibiotics just for a simple fever the most of the time when we have fever with runny nose or cough 90% of the time those symptoms are secondary to a viral infection and by definition viruses are not treated by antibiotics they actually are self-limited illnesses and our immune system takes care of them so therefore most of the time simple colds and sinus infections even ear infections are don't need to be treated with antibiotics and you're actually doing a disservice to your own system and to the community by using an antibiotic that not only is not gonna change how long your child is sick but also is going to change the whole normal bacteria that live with us make them more resistant and as I said lose that whole class of drugs in the future to treat something that actually needs treatment with antibiotics so I educate parents about that all the time and I even ask parents that if they are offered antibiotics in an urgent care or an emergency room they should probably question the doctor and say does my child really need the antibiotic and that's what a smart parent should do from now on rather than ask for it say oh please doctor can you give me an amoxicillin or a z-pack prescription on the contrary you should you should question the doctor and say does my child really need the

antibiotic because it can be potentially more harmful than helpful to your child.

That's good advice but Dr. K we're running out of time here now but I want to thank you for being here for joining us in SBH Bronx Health Talk for more information on services available SBH health system visit www.sbhny.org and thank you for joining us today.

Thank You Mr. Clark