

Choosing the right NHS services this Christmas break...

As you know there are a number of illnesses that children are more likely to pick up over winter. As a parent or guardian it can frighten us, particularly if it's symptoms we've not seen before. The first thing is to **keep calm!** The right NHS services are everywhere.

There's more choice than your GP or A&E. There are a number of health services options which can help bring peace of mind, or direct you to the right service if needed.

NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) is a website which has details of symptoms and courses of action for common childhood conditions such as rashes, a bang to the head, coughs, colds and high temperatures.

Pharmacies can give health advice if you'd like to talk to someone. They will also advise you about what medicines to keep in the medicine cabinet for the whole family – from pain relief to keep that temperature down, to anti-histamines for that annoying itchy rash, to antiseptic cream and plasters for minor cuts and bruises.

Contact your GP if you think it's a bit more serious or it's related to a condition your child has previously had. Give your GP a call and discuss your concerns – it saves wasted trips to A&E as they have access to your child's medical history.

If it's **out of hours** – the GP's closed or you can't get an appointment – call **NHS Direct on 0845 4647/ NHS 111**. Trained advisors will talk with you over the phone about your child and offer advice on any appropriate treatment. Don't forget, if it's an emergency they will arrange for an ambulance.

Norovirus (winter vomiting bug) is rife at the moment, but by encouraging your children to practice good hand hygiene, you can help to limit the spread of the infection and there are some simple steps that the public can take to help stop norovirus spreading:

- **Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water**, particularly after using the toilet, and before preparing food. If you're in an NHS facility, pay attention to hand hygiene notices such as using hand gel upon entering and leaving a ward.
- **Disinfect any surfaces or objects that could be contaminated with a Norovirus**. It is best to use a bleach-based household cleaner. Always follow the instructions on the cleaning product.
- **Flush away any infected faeces or vomit** in the toilet. You should also keep the surrounding toilet area clean and hygienic.
- **Wash any clothing, or linens, which could have become contaminated with a Norovirus**. Washing with hot, soapy water will help to ensure that the virus is killed.
- Although people usually recover without treatment in 24–72 hours, **it is important to stay away from work, school, college or any social gatherings until you have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours**.

If your child has Norovirus, the best thing they can do is rest, and take plenty of non-caffeinated drinks to avoid dehydration.

Please don't visit your GP surgery or local A&E Unit. You should recover naturally without any specific treatment.