



C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

National Poll

on Children's Health



Sick Kids: Can Parents Get Same-Day Doctor Appointments?

Parents of sick children often want to get advice from their child's health care provider. This can be an office visit, phone advice or an email exchange with their child's usual provider's office. Other times, parents may take their child to an urgent care clinic or an emergency department for sick care.

In October 2016, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 0-18 years of age about their experiences trying to get health care advice or a provider visit for a sick child.

How Do Parents Get Same-Day Care for Sick Kids?

Almost all parents had experience in the last two years trying to contact a provider for help or advice for a sick child, with 89% trying to make an appointment to have their child seen. Parents also tried to get help from their provider over the phone (50%) or through email or a patient portal (11%).

When asked what they would do if their child woke up in the morning with a fever and sore throat, parents reported they would try several different strategies to get medical help:

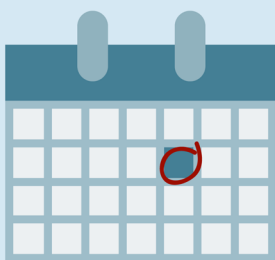
- 60% would call for an appointment with their child's provider
- 42% would call their child's provider for advice
- 42% would take their child to urgent care, retail clinic or an ER
- 10% would email their child's provider for advice

Parents also expressed varying levels of confidence in their ability to get a same-day appointment or medical advice from their child's usual provider if their child had a sore throat and fever. About half (53%) were very confident they could get a same-day appointment while (60%) were very confident they could get same-day phone advice; only 25% were very confident they could get timely email advice.

Parent confidence in getting same-day care/ advice for sick child

Percent of parents who are *very confident*

Appointment
the same day
53%



Email advice
the same day
25%



Phone advice
the same day
60%

Report Highlights

Only about half of parents are very confident they can get a same-day appointment with their provider for a sick child.

About 4 in 10 parents will take their child to an urgent care, retail clinic or emergency department if they wake up with sore throat and fever.

10% of parents would use email with their provider to get advice for a sick child.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in October 2016 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents age 18 and older (n=2,036). Adults were selected from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 2,036 parents who had at least one child age 0-18 years. The margin of error is ± 1 to 2 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

Co-Director: Sarah J. Clark, MPH

Co-Director: Gary L. Freed, MD, MPH

Poll Manager: Dianne C. Singer, MPH

Data Analyst: Acham Gebremariam, MS

Web Editor: Anna Daly Kauffman, BA

Research Associate: Sara L. Schultz, BA

Child Health Evaluation
and Research Center



University of Michigan

Implications

Almost all parents have been in the position of needing to contact a provider to get help for a sick child. Getting timely medical advice or seeing a provider when their child is sick can be a frustrating experience for some parents. Most parents in this Mott Poll would want their child with a fever and sore throat to have an appointment to see their child's provider. However, only around half were very confident in their ability to actually get a same-day appointment. Offices usually have only a limited number of "sick visits" available each day and these can fill up quickly, especially in winter months. Often parents may be able to get an appointment, just not with their child's usual provider. However, in some practices, parents who are not able to call first thing in the morning or have a child who gets sick later in the day may be out of luck.

In many child health practices, other options are available to parents. More parents were confident in their ability to get same-day phone advice from their provider's office—for many minor illnesses, nurse advice over the phone can be a timely and efficient way to get medical help and to decide if an appointment is needed. Some larger practices have nurses who spend most of their day answering calls from parents for phone advice. This can be frustrating for those parents who only want to speak with a doctor, but many parents find nurse advice helpful. Plus, when necessary, the nurse can also consult with the doctor or other providers in the practice. Parents may also be able to get phone advice in the evenings or weekends when the practice is closed.

Some practices offer advice through email or a patient portal, an online way to contact the practice. Although only a small proportion of parents in this Mott Poll would try this route to get help, it may increase in the coming years. Email and patient portals are most commonly used for medication refills and other requests that are not urgent. Parents usually want, and need, more timely advice for a sick child than is commonly available through email. Many practices will give notice to parents that email may not be answered more than once a day and should not be used for urgent advice. For email and patient portals to become more useful to parents in these situations, practices would need medical staff in place to quickly respond to parent questions.

Many parents reported they would take their child with a fever and sore throat to an urgent care center, retail clinic in a pharmacy or an emergency department. When appointments at their child's provider are not available, and parents want a child to be seen by a medical professional, many areas of the country have increasing options like these available to families. Most offer walk-in appointments and may be convenient for some families; however, parents should realize that the provider will not know their child's medical history and should also check to see if the services are covered by their insurance. If parents choose any of these options, they should make sure that the clinic provides information about the visit to their child's regular provider so the medical record of the child is kept up to date.

When parents are picking a provider or practice for their child, they should discuss what to do when their child is sick and what type of arrangements are made for urgent visits or advice. Providers have different systems in place to address parent concerns when their child is ill, and parents should try to find a practice that best matches their expectations.