

[IMAGE]

In Your Best Interest?

When you or one of your children catch a cold, chances are good that a virus is to blame. In fact, evidence suggests that 60-75% of colds, bronchitis, and other upper respiratory tract infections are caused by viruses.

Unfortunately, chances are also good that a medical doctor will prescribe an antibiotic, despite substantial evidence that antibiotics are ineffective against viral infections. Doctors know the statistics, but for some reason, they don't always share the information with you.

A study published in the research journal *Pediatrics* examined pediatrician prescribing behaviors as they related to parental expectations. Ten physicians and more than 300 parents attending sick visits for their children were surveyed. Results showed that when physicians thought a parent wanted an antibiotic for viral complaints, they prescribed one 62% of the time, compared with only 7% of the time when they did not think the parent wanted antibiotics.

The bottom line? Many medical doctors prescribed unnecessary medication --antibiotics they knew would be ineffective against viral infections -- because they thought that's what parents expected. The researchers suggest that steps need to be taken to change physician perceptions regarding parental expectations. After all, parents may or may not expect antibiotics, but what they probably expect (and want) most of all is a doctor who provides quality, accurate and honest health care each and every visit.

Reference:

Mangione-Smith R, McGlynn E, Elliott M, et al. The relationship between parental expectations and pediatrician antimicrobial prescribing behavior. *Pediatrics*, April 1999: Vol. 103, No. 4, pp711-718.

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