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# An ER doctor says kids are coming into the hospital with terrifying hallucinations — and warns it's a classic flu symptom

328



Hilary Brueck

Thu, December 15, 2022 at 5:09 PM EST · 2 min read

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Dr. MacKinlay and her daughter Marissa, who recently had the flu. courtesy of Dr. Kathryn MacKinlay, Interior Health

- A mom and ER doctor says her 7-year-old daughter recently started hallucinating and hearing voices.

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the flu, can prompt brief periods of delirium. One recent morning at 7 a.m., Kathryn MacKinlay realized her sick daughter Marissa was hallucinating.

"Mommy, Mommy, make it stop!" Marissa said. She described hearing people shouting unbearably.

MacKinlay tried to soothe her 7-year-old's fears: "Sweetie, no one is yelling."

The pediatrician was able to remain calm because she knew exactly what was happening to her daughter. Marissa was sick, with other flu-like symptoms. The hallucinations her little one was experiencing were the exact same kind of brief delirium that has filled up her hospital in recent weeks. It's a signal of the body's fight against a common, invading virus.

"As an emergency doctor, I have seen many other kids hallucinating these last few weeks," MacKinlay said in a recent blog post. "These young patients have all been influenza positive."

### Why hallucinations can be a hallmark of the flu



A positive test is the only way to know for sure if your child has the flu. Luis Acosta/AFP via Getty Images

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- seeing objects as too large or too far away
- and feeling scared that someone or something is trying to hurt them

These are all classic signs of the delirium that can come along with the [fevers our body uses](#) to fight against infection.

Our brains are sensitive to temperature changes, so [fevers can lead to hallucinations](#) by disrupting normal activity. The episodes are generally brief, lasting just a few minutes, and do not require medical attention.

If a child's fever is [higher than 104 degrees Fahrenheit](#), does not respond to [treatment](#) like Advil (ibuprofen) or Tylenol (acetaminophen), or if a patient is experiencing prolonged episodes of confusion (for more than a few minutes), it's time to seek help.

But in most cases, "your little one will be okay," MacKinlay said. Simply "offer cuddles" and wait for the feverish confusion to pass. The doctor recommends "alternating Advil and Tylenol every three hours" to bring the patient's fever down, which should, in turn, alleviate delirium episodes.



courtesy of Dr. Kathryn MacKinlay, Interior Health

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**Metal** ...

15 December, 2022

In '75, I had the flu and a 104 fever. I remember seeing a floating head in my closet and began screaming. My father came in, got down to my level and 'saw' what I saw, minus the floating, bobbing motion. It was the arm, cuff and button on his coat. To him it was stationary, but to me it swayed, morphed and bobbed up and down dramatically, with the eye (button) staring at me. I was put into a cool bath and fed children's aspirin until it broke. I think I'll remember that for the rest of my life, like it was yesterday.

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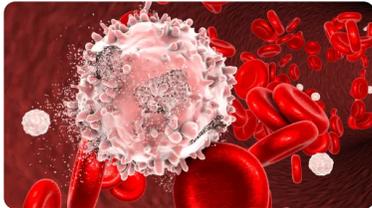
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