**Protect your Little Ones this Monsoon**

**Source: Dr. SoonuUdani; Director, Critical Care& Emergency Services, SRCC Children’s Hospital**

Catching raindrops on your tongue, jumping over puddles, the adventure of wading in knee-deep water and a few extra school holidays. This is what kids wait for when the academic year begins with the onset of the monsoon. Nasty visitors like viral fevers, pneumonia and leptospirosis turn up every year along with the first showers. While many of these cannot be prevented, but we can take some precautionary measures against them, as well as, some measures to prevent accidents during times of flooding.

**Illnesses**: Waterborne illnesses like typhoid, hepatitis from viruses and diarrhoea are common and vaccines are available for prevention. Parents should check with their doctors before the monsoon season sets in about vaccinations that may be needed. These could help prevent some types of viral infections and pneumonia-like swine flu and pneumococcal pneumonia. Children who have a tendency to wheeze could also be started on preventive medication to reduce their chances of severe episodes or attacks.

Clean drinking water that is boiled and filtered is a simple preventive measure. Avoid roadside eateries and eat only hot, freshly cooked food and bottled water when out or travelling. Chutneys, sherbets and other water containing foods are not safe unless the water source is well known.

**Flooding**: We anticipate at least one or two days of serious flooding and this can take you or your child unawares. Keep the school bag as light as possible and pack energy bars or high energy food that won’t get spoilt and drinking water, in case the child has to stay back in school.

If your child is caught up in a storm or has to wade through dirty water, what can you do? Be sure your child has a good raincoat and waterproof shoes as it’s very important to keep your child dry. Footwear is important as the bug for leptospirosis can enter from dirty water through small cuts in the feet. However enjoyable splashing water barefoot may sound, it can be dangerous. In wading through deep waters, warn your child to always stay with a group of friends and with known adults and never to go with strangers, no matter what they say about taking them home or bringing them messages from their parents. Children are vulnerable at times of disaster. When walking through water, children must always hold hands and form a chain to hold on to each other, in case of one tripping or falling into an open hole. Teach your child team spirit.

**In case of illness:** If your child falls ill after such an incident, immediately consult your doctor. Do not start any antibiotics on your own, not even as a preventive measure, just because your child has been exposed to flood waters. Your doctor will decide if any preventive medicine for leptospirosis is needed. Unnecessary antibiotics may make the diagnosis and further treatment difficult. Most illnesses are self-limiting as they are caused by viruses. A recurrent cough and cold are not uncommon at this time. Know the danger signals. Fever is a common symptom and not an illness or disease in itself. It can occur with minor viral illnesses or with serious life-threatening ones as well. It may also occur in diseases without infection. While we often advise parents to wait for the first two days of fever before consulting a doctor, there are times when it may be best to go early if you feel uncomfortable about the way your child is behaving or if the child is under three months.

There are serious illnesses during this season like leptospirosis, influenza and dengue. All of them can have a wide variation from mild to severe, and it is best that the child with a persistent fever gets diagnosed by a doctor, preferably a paediatrician. Very high fever, severe pain, vomiting or any symptoms that are not relieved, especially serious ones like drowsiness or convulsions, are indications for you to visit the nearest emergency room (ER or casualty), rather than struggling to contact your doctor on the phone and waste time. If your doctor advises a visit to the hospital or admission, it is best to comply. Contrary to popular belief, doctors for children try to keep them out of the hospital rather than admitting them.