

# Babybonic Plague

by Steven J. Kolbe

What is the half-life of the daycare cold? That's what I'd like to know. Somewhere a scientist is carbon-dating a pterodactyl's knuckles, but does anyone really care? I mean, it's not like there are any pterodactyls left, right? (Or is this one of the animals you only see at the zoo?)

We were, of course, told that children are germ monsters and that sending your child to daycare meant she'd bring home every virus and bacterial infection that had ever graced your part of the country--including but not limited to Small Pox, Bird Flu, and the Bubonic Plague--but nobody said it would happen on day one.

Baby Plague moved through our apartment like WiFi, filling every nook and cranny and leaving in its wake piles of used Kleenex and collapsed, napping parents. Then, just when we thought it had passed, a second wave rocked our tiny home. Susan thinks it will leave when our last (as-yet-unborn) child finishes daycare--a hypothetical time-period measured not in years but in decades. I'm not so optimistic. I'm beginning to feel this is incurable. "How did you go?" St. Peter will ask me. To which I'll reply with a proud father's gleam in my eye: "Oh just Baby Plague. Did I already tell you I have a daughter?"

There are things you don't realize when becoming a parent. Namely, that to love your daughter means becoming a mouth-breather, but also that her precious, barely-audible cough will transform into a hacking, wheezing pestilence once *your* immune system starts taking a crack at it. You also don't realize that you'll only get to tell your daughter "I love you" for the first three months, because once daycare starts you're going to "lub" her.

But who doesn't love blowing their nose all day, sneezing in the

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middle of meetings, and napping through every evening? On second thought, I love naps! Or rather, I *lub* them. Further still, what winter in Kansas has my immune system *not* been utterly compromised, issuing in weeks of sniffing, eye watering, chicken soup, and pot roast? And sometimes all in the same bowl. Cold season is, well, just that. At least this year we get an adorable baby to blame it on.

What makes it all worthwhile is Bonnie's gratitude. I can tell that's she's grateful because right after I change her diaper, swaddle her, read her a bedtime story, and put her in the bassinet, I lean down and my daughter thanks me. She thanks me in her inscrutable but transfixing baby language...by sneezing in my mouth.

