

On Flu and Vampires...

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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God, I love this city sometimes. Love it, love it, love it. Obviously, there are also moments when I would rather be anywhere else, but in the final glorious weeks of summer when the humidity has gone out of the nights, the colors are so crisp you could slice them with a knife, and — pre-Sept. 1 — the traffic still hasn't quite returned to it's normal madness, it doesn't take much to convince me that this is one of the most interesting places in the world to be. (Can you tell that this post was originally written at the beginning of last week, by any chance?)

Today's moment of bliss is brought to you by the letters "U" and "R" — for "Utterly Ridiculous." They could just as easily be brought to you by the letters "I T T W T T C," as in "I Thought This Was The Twenty-First Century," but I figured "U" and "R" are a little briefer...

So. I was chatting with an acquaintance at the school gate, whose youngest child had recently started there. This friend explained to me that after a few years of having her daughters in the Russian schooling system, she had finally given in and moved her daughters to an international school a year ago, and that this move had been prompted in no small way by the

reaction of her younger daughter's nursery to the global flu epidemic almost two years ago.

The nursery that her daughter attended was not your normal run of the mill Dyetsky Sad. It was in the double-digits bracket of the rating system. Schools and nurseries here are numbered, and while I'm told that it doesn't *necessarily* denote excellence to be in the low digits, places at those establishments with No. 1 to 99 are usually more highly sought after. For example, you could attend School No. 1, in which case you would probably stand a better than average chance of being president or one of his/her (oh, who am I kidding? "His") advisers one day — or School No. 753, in which case you would probably not. Consequently this fairly high-ranking nursery was somewhere she was delighted for her daughter to attend; in this lady's words, "you had to know people to get your child in there."

Imagine, then, my friend's consternation on reading the instructions from the school physician regarding actions the parents were expected to take to help their children combat the possibility of contracting flu.

It was October 2009, at the height of the swine flu panic, when she received them. Every parent was instructed to source a capsule from inside a Kinder Surprise egg (in other words, the pod inside the egg that holds the toy), and make a couple of holes in one end — for a string long enough to be worn around their child's neck to be threaded through — and a few smaller holes at the other. Inside the capsule they were instructed to place a couple of peeled garlic cloves. Then, and here's the genius part, the children were expected to wear the pod at school (as were all the teachers) for the duration of the flu alert. Without this scientifically proven anti-flu measure, no child or teacher would be allowed onto the school premises...

Like I said, sometimes I just love this place.

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