

Infection Prevention & Control

Respiratory viruses

A respiratory virus is an illness that infects the respiratory (breathing) system.

There are a variety of different respiratory viruses. The most well-known respiratory viruses are influenza (known as 'flu') and Covid-19.

Respiratory viruses can affect any age group. The symptoms vary in severity from person to person and can be very mild or quite severe.

The viruses may make other illnesses worse, such as asthma or COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).

Those most at risk of complications are young children, the elderly, and people with weaker immune systems or other chronic illnesses.

Respiratory viruses include:

- Influenza A and B
- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)
- Para influenza viruses
- Adenoviruses
- Human metapneumovirus
- Coronaviruses (including Covid-19)
- Rhinoviruses



Symptoms of common respiratory viruses

The symptoms of respiratory infections are very similar. It is not always possible to tell if a patient has Covid-19, influenza or another respiratory infection based on symptoms alone.

Most people with respiratory infections will have relatively mild illness, especially if they are vaccinated.

Symptoms of Covid-19, 'flu and common respiratory infections include:

- continuous cough
- high temperature, fever or chills
- loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell
- shortness of breath
- unexplained tiredness, lack of energy
- muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise
- not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry
- headache that is unusual or longer lasting than usual
- sore throat, stuffy or runny nose
- diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick

How do respiratory viruses spread?

Respiratory infections can spread easily between people. It is important to be aware of symptoms so you can take action to reduce the risk of spreading your infection to other people.

If you have symptoms of a respiratory infection such as Covid-19, and you have a high temperature or you do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, try to stay at home. Avoid contact with other people until you no longer have a temperature (if you had one) or until you no longer feel unwell.

Patient Information

If you have symptoms of a respiratory virus, make sure to:

- Cover your nose and mouth if you sneeze or cough (preferably with a tissue)
- Put used tissues in a bin
- Wash your hands or use alcohol gel regularly, and always after coughing, sneezing or touching contaminated objects or surfaces
- Keep surfaces clean - viruses can live on surfaces for hours/days depending on the virus.

Treating respiratory viruses

At home:

If you have a respiratory virus at home, you should:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Take pain relief medication, such as paracetamol, if you need to

Most people get better without needing any treatment. Seek medical advice if your symptoms become more severe or last longer than a week.

If you develop symptoms of 'flu or another respiratory virus and you are pregnant or have a chronic or long-standing illness, contact your GP for advice.

In hospital:

In some cases, we may need to treat your respiratory virus in hospital. This may be because your symptoms are more severe or lead to further illness. Or because you develop the symptoms while you are being treated in hospital for another condition.

The healthcare team will wear masks, aprons, and eye protection (visors or goggles) when caring for you.

Patient Information

If you need to leave your bed (for example, to go for an X-ray), we may ask you to wear a mask until you return.

In hospital, we will take nose and throat swabs to test for respiratory viruses.

If you have a respiratory virus, we will try to prevent spread to other patients, staff and visitors by giving you a bed in a single room, or a bed in a cohort bay with patients with the same virus.

If you have 'flu, we may prescribe you oseltamivir (known as Tamiflu). These treatments work best if you start them in the first two days of having symptoms.

Vaccinations

The best way to protect yourself against 'flu and Covid-19 is to have vaccinations when invited to do so by your GP and be diligent with your hand hygiene.

Vaccinations are especially important if you are at high risk of infection. You should contact your GP if you do not receive an invitation once vaccinations are being advertised.

We look to protect staff, visitors, and partners by offering all staff free 'flu and Covid-19 vaccinations.

Useful links

Public Health England

[Annual flu programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Patient Information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us on 024 7696 4791 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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Document History

Department:	Infection Prevention & Control
Contact:	24791
Updated:	June 2023
Review:	June 2026
Version:	3
Reference:	HIC/LFT/2302/18