

About respiratory illness

Symptoms



Fever



Cough



Sore throat



Runny nose



Shortness of breath



Muscle aches



Fatigue



Vomiting / diarrhea



Abdominal pain

What to do if you have symptoms



Stay home until you are fever-free (without using fever-reducing medication) **AND** your symptoms have been improving for 24 hours (48 hours for vomiting/diarrhea).



Avoid non-essential mask-less activities for 10 days from when your symptoms started. If you can't stay home, wear a well-fitting mask.



If you have symptoms of a respiratory illness **DON'T VISIT** those at high risk of severe illness including those that live in long-term care, retirement homes or in hospital.

Reduce the spread



Wash your hands often and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.



Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.



Keep your vaccinations up to date including getting your annual flu vaccine and any COVID-19 boosters/doses you are eligible for.



Disinfect high-touch surfaces in your home and workplace.



Wear a mask:

- To protect yourself from viral respiratory illnesses.
- To protect others at higher risk of severe respiratory illness.
- When you're recovering from illness.

Types



COVID-19 can cause mild cold-like symptoms to severe lung infections. Anti-viral treatment is available for those at higher risk of severe disease and complications.



Influenza (flu) generally occurs in the fall and winter months. Young children (under five) and older adults are at higher risk of severe disease and complications.



Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infects the lungs and airways. Infants, young children and older adults are more likely to have severe infections.



Coughs and colds (cold viruses) are more common during the fall and winter months and result from different viruses that infect the nose and throat. For most people, symptoms are mild and usually resolve on their own.



People at **higher risk** of severe illness or complications from COVID-19 and the flu include:

- People who are 65 years and older, pregnant, have chronic medical conditions or are immunocompromised.
- Young children (under 5) are at higher risk of complications from the flu.

Treatment



Most respiratory illnesses can be treated at home. Learn more at: kflaph.ca/RespTreatment



Treatment for COVID-19 is available and must be taken within five days of symptoms starting. Learn more at: Ontario.ca/Antivirals.

When to go to the emergency department

If you or your child are in distress (significant trouble breathing, chest pain, fainting, difficulty to rouse, confusion or have significant worsening of any chronic disease symptoms), go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 9-1-1.

More Info



kflaph.ca/Respinfections



If you have questions about your health (or your child's), call your primary care provider or Health Connect Ontario at 8-1-1.

Family Doctor Tips on Caring for Children with Respiratory Symptoms

Most respiratory illness in children, including colds, influenza, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) and COVID-19 can be managed at home without the need for prescription medications. However, in some cases, it is important to seek medical care.

Below, family doctors share tips on how to decide when to seek care for a respiratory illness and how to support your child at home.

Call your family doctor if your child:

- Has a fever lasting 72 hours or longer.
- Has a fever that went away for a day or longer (without fever medication) and then came back.
- Is unusually irritable and won't stop fussing, even after treating their fever.
- Has an earache lasting more than 48 hours.
- Is not eating or drinking. Note that it's normal to eat and drink less when sick. Liquids are more important than food.
- Has special needs that make caring for them more difficult.

As a parent or guardian, you know your child best. If you feel your child needs to be seen by a family doctor, please reach out for help.



Not sure what to do? Health Connect Ontario has a **symptom checker** and the option to **chat live with a nurse**. You can also **call 811** to speak with a nurse, available 24 hours a day.

Call 911 or go to the emergency department when:

- You are worried that your child is seriously ill.
- Your infant, younger than three months old, has a fever.
- Your child is struggling to breathe or is breathing faster than normal.
- You are concerned that your child is at risk of dehydration or is dehydrated.

These are only some examples of when to seek emergency care. Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) has more information to **help decide if your child needs emergency care**.

For more information specific to COVID-19 and children, including rare complications, see **My Child Has COVID. What Should I Know?** in the **Confused About COVID** series.



Helping your child at home

- **Fever:** Treat fever or pain with over-the-counter medicines such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen if your child can take it. As a reminder, Aspirin or products containing acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) are not recommended for children.



Call your family doctor or pharmacist for advice if you are having difficulty accessing over-the-counter medicines. Information from the Canadian Pediatric Society outlines **how to take a child's temperature** and what to do if they have a fever. Here is a video on **managing fever in a child** from the U.K.'s National Health Service.

- **Red eyes and discharge:** These symptoms almost always go away on their own, without antibiotic drops or other medication. Warm compresses and artificial tears can help reduce discomfort.
- **Stuffy and runny nose:** Try saline rinsing sprays, a humidifier or a nasal aspirator.
- **Earache:** If you notice your child tugging on their ear, they may have an earache. Get assessed if your child's earache lasts more than 48-72 hours, if there is discharge from the ear or they have had more than 2-3 ear infections in the last year.
- **Cough:** Treat a cough with a humidifier or the steam from a shower. If the cough sounds like a bark, cool outside air may help. If your child is at least one year old, you can give them 1-2 teaspoons of honey in the evening.
- **Fluids:** Make sure your child gets enough fluids, including water, soups, fruit juice or even popsicles. Breastmilk/formula is enough for young babies who do not drink other fluids.

Tips to stay healthy and prevent illness

- Wear a mask (and have your child wear a mask) when in crowded, public indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands often and well; use hand sanitizer when washing is not possible.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow instead of your hands.
- Stay home and keep your child home when they are sick, especially in the first couple of days when most infectious.
- Get the flu shot and keep COVID-19 doses up to date.



Ontario College of
Family Physicians



The OCFP thanks Dr. Kate Miller and Norfolk Family Medical for the **blog post** which inspired this information.