

Preventing the spread of respiratory infections

Infection Prevention

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: December 2024

Next review: December 2027

Leaflet number: 1010 Version: 3

Introduction

Respiratory infections are infections of the nose, throat, ears, sinuses and the lungs. They are most often caused by viruses, but they can also be caused by bacteria. This leaflet only gives information on respiratory virus infections.

What are the different viruses?

COVID 19, Influenza A and B (known as flu), Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), Parainfluenza, Human metapneumovirus, Enterovirus, Rhinovirus, Adenovirus, Parechovirus, Coronavirus (not COVID 19).

What are the symptoms?

Many people have mild or no symptoms of infection. If you are more unwell you can have 1 or more of these symptoms:

- cough
- 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

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

- 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 virus spread?

Viruses spread from person to person mostly through coughing or sneezing.

Touching surfaces contaminated by droplets from coughs or sneeze, and then putting your unwashed fingers in your mouth, nose or eyes, can also lead to infection.

What will happen during my stay in hospital?

If we think you have an infection that could be spread to others, you may be cared for in a single room (isolation) or in a dedicated bay in a ward (cohort area).

We will do a nose and throat test to check if there are any viruses that could cause an infection.

We rub a swab (like an absorbent cotton bud) is rubbed around your throat and then your nose.

It only takes a few seconds, it is usually painless, but can be uncomfortable.

We will send your swab sample to the laboratory for testing. It can take up to 12 hours to get a result.

What treatment might I need?

Treatment is aimed at reducing your symptoms and helping you breathe. Depending on your illness, it may include:

- medication to lower a fever and reduce pain.
- oxygen to help you breathe.
- making sure you drink lots of fluids; this may be given through a vein (intravenous drip) if you are not able to drink.
- lots of rest.
- antivirals

Antibiotics do not work against virus infections such as COVID-19 or flu. You will only be given antibiotics if there is a strong chance that you also have a bacterial infection.

Some patients may develop severe symptoms and need treatment in an intensive care unit, which may include passing a tube through your mouth to your windpipe and a machine (ventilator) to help you breathe.

How do I avoid catching or spreading viruses?

There are things you can do to help stop viruses from spreading:

Do: .

- Wear a mask
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitiser
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze. Do not use your hands
- Put used tissues in the bin straight away. Wash your hands afterwards.
- Wash your hands when you get into work, and when you get home.
- Clean often touched surfaces every day.

Don't:

- Touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.
- Have close contact with people who are unwell.
- Go to work or carry out normal activities if you are unwell with fever and other symptoms, try to stay at home.

Vaccination

The best way to protect to yourself against influenza is to get vaccination. If you are at high risk of infection make sure you get your vaccination every year.

Contact details

For further information or advise, contact the Infection Prevention Team on 0116 258 5448.

