

Respiratory infections, including COVID-19, 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. The symptoms of many respiratory infections are similar, and it therefore not possible to differentiate between COVID-19, flu or other infections that have a relatively mild illness based upon symptoms alone. Some common symptoms 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

Anyone with these symptoms who has a high temperature, or does not feel well enough to go to work or school, should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people. It is particularly important to avoid close contact with anyone who you know is at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell if they are infected with COVID-19 and other respiratory infections

People who are at higher risk from COVID-19 and other respiratory infections include:

- older people
- those who are pregnant
- those who are unvaccinated
- people of any age [whose immune system means they are at higher risk of serious illness](#)
- people of any age with [certain long-term conditions](#)

COVID-19 presents a low risk to children and young people, and most of those who are fully vaccinated. Respiratory infections are common in children and young people, particularly during the winter months. Symptoms can be caused by several respiratory infections including the common cold, COVID-19 and RSV. For most children and young people, these illnesses will not be serious, and they will soon recover following rest and plenty of fluids.

Children and young people with mild symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough, who are otherwise well, can continue to attend their education setting. Children and young people who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact with other people, where they can. They can go back to school, college or childcare,

and resume normal activities when they no longer have a high temperature and they are well enough to attend.

All children and young people with respiratory symptoms should be encouraged to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing and/or sneezing and to wash their hands after using or disposing of tissues.

It is *not* recommended that children and young people (anyone aged 18 years and under) are tested for COVID-19 unless directed to by a health professional.

If adults want to get tested for COVID-19, they are able to purchase test kits from some pharmacies and retailers, in person or online. Free tests are no longer available for most people.

Anyone with a positive COVID test can pass on the virus to other people for up to 10 days from when the infection starts. However, many people will no longer be infectious to others after 5 days. Any adult testing positive should avoid contact with others for 5 days and avoid meeting people at higher risk from COVID-19 for 10 days.

For children who test positive, or a young person aged 18 or under, they should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 3 days, as they tend to be infectious to others for less time than adults. If they're well and do not have a temperature after 3 days, there's a much lower risk that they'll pass on COVID-19 to others

Steps that settings can take to reduce the spread of respiratory infections and protect those at higher risk:

1. Ventilation

Poorly ventilated areas increase the risk of spreading respiratory infections (including COVID-19), particularly if there are lots of infected people present. Viruses can also remain in the air after an infected person has left. Bringing fresh air into a room by opening a door or a window, even for a few minutes at a time, helps remove older stale air that could contain virus particles and reduces the chance of spreading infections. Trickle vents (small vents usually on the top of a window) or grilles can also be useful for bringing a little fresh air constantly. The more fresh air that is brought inside, the quicker any viruses will be removed from the room. CO2 monitors can be used to identify areas of poor ventilation. Further detail can be found [here](#).

2. Good hygiene

Following these basic rules of good hygiene will help to protect you and others from COVID-19 as well as many other common infections:

- cover your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze
- wash your hands
- clean your surroundings

3. Vaccination

Vaccinations (for those eligible) provide good protection against hospitalisation and death. This includes COVID-19 vaccination and flu vaccination. There is [more information about the vaccinations available and when you should have them on the NHS website](#).

Those attending education or childcare settings will not normally be expected to wear a face covering

Guidance on how educational and childcare settings should plan for and deal with emergencies, including significant public health incidents, can be found [here](#).