

## Patient Update

Nov 3, 2023

Dear patients,

We are writing to share information and tips to help support you and your family manage upper respiratory illnesses (URIs) this fall. As many of you may be noticing, we are seeing a spike in respiratory illnesses in the community. We wanted to share some tips for how to care for yourself or family at home, when to call our clinics, and when to seek emergency care.

### **What you can do at home to manage an upper respiratory illness (URI)**

A URI is an infection of the upper respiratory tract (nose, sinuses, throat). These include the common cold and influenza (the flu). Colds are caused by many different viruses, are incredibly common especially in children, and can happen several times a year. Typical symptoms include stuffy or runny nose, sore throat, sneezing, cough, congestion, low grade fever, reduced appetite, fussiness and less energy than normal. Nasal drainage can range from clear & watery to thick & yellow or green. The flu has similar symptoms to a common cold, but the symptoms can often be worse and can in rare cases lead to complications in higher-risk individuals.

**Cold and flu symptoms usually get better on their own within 7 days.** Commonly, a fever will last 2-4 days. The sore throat may last 5 days. Runny nose and congestion may last up to 2 weeks. A cough may last 3 weeks. The vast majority of upper respiratory tract infections are viral, and do not require or get better with antibiotics.

Unfortunately, there are no medicines that can cure a cold or flu. But you can help yourself or your child feel better with these strategies:

- Lots of fluids and rest.
- Fever, sore throat, and muscle aches can be treated with acetaminophen or ibuprofen (use children's medication for kids, see bottle for dosing).
- Honey (for children over 12 months) is a natural way to soothe a cough. Over-the-counter cough medication is NOT recommended in children.
- Saline nose drops and/or a humidifier to help with decongestion.
- Use a nasal aspirator with saline drops for children who cannot blow their nose to help with decongestion.

## When to call our clinics or seek emergency care for cold and flu symptoms

We know being sick and caring for someone who is sick can be stressful and overwhelming. The majority of cases of colds and flu can simply be managed at home. We encourage you to use the trusted resources below to help you in your self-care and decision-making, including when you should call and book an appointment with us or seek care from the emergency department.

- [Family Doctor Tips on Managing Respiratory Symptoms](#)
  - See handouts for managing respiratory symptoms in kids in other languages [here](#)
- [SickKids-About Kids Health, Managing URIs](#)
- [Choose Wisely- Navigating colds, flu and kids](#)

## If you think you may have COVID-19 follow these tips

It is usually not possible to tell whether you have a cold, flu or COVID-19, as the symptoms can be very similar. Ontario has a free self-assessment tool which can help you determine if you may have COVID-19

- <https://www.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>

If you test positive on a Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT) at home, it is very likely you have a COVID-19 infection. If you test negative on a RAT three days in a row it is likely you do not have a COVID-19 infection.

If you are unable to get any Rapid Antigen Tests at home and you are considered high-risk for complications from COVID19 then you are eligible for a COVID19 PCR test. You can search for a PCR testing location here (we suggest you call the testing location ahead of time):

- <https://www.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations/>

There is also a tool to help determine if you may be eligible for COVID19 anti-viral treatments (eg Paxlovid) and who you can contact to obtain the treatment (again, calling ahead is recommended).

- <https://www.ontario.ca/covid-treatment-screener/>

If you think you need a PCR COVID-19 test or anti-viral treatment (eg Paxlovid) and are having trouble getting these in the community, please call us for assistance.

## Booking an appointment with us

Please note in the resources above when you should visit the emergency department.

If after reviewing the resources above you feel you need to see us, please call to book an appointment. For children under the age of 5 we recommend booking an in-person visit. For older children and adults you can book either an in-person or virtual appointment based on what you think is appropriate.

If your doctor or NP does not have a timely appointment available, you will be able to speak with one of the clinic nurses who will review your symptoms, provide health advice and can consult with a clinic doctor if needed.

When you are booking an appointment and when you arrive at clinic, let our clerical team know you have symptoms of a URI. Our team will direct you to a private room to wait to see your provider.

## Practice good public health measures

You can reduce your risk of infection by washing your hands frequently, wearing a mask when in indoor and crowded public spaces, and staying home when you are sick. Taking these precautions will help reduce the spread of illness and keep everyone safe. Please be reminded that masking is required in our clinics. Masking reduces the spread of viruses and protects others, including our patients who have cancer, are elderly or are especially vulnerable for other reasons.

We also strongly encourage that all eligible patients 6 months and older receive the COVID vaccination and the [flu vaccination](#) to protect yourselves and your loved ones. The flu shot is safe and does not cause the flu. If you still need your flu vaccine, you can call our offices to book an appointment. You can also access flu vaccines and COVID vaccines at many local [pharmacies](#) and [community clinics](#).

Take care and be well,

*SMHAFHT Leadership Team*