

Patient Update

Dec 5, 2025

Dear patients,

We are writing to share information and tips to help support you and your family manage upper respiratory illnesses (URIs) this winter. We wanted to share some tips for how to care for yourself or family at home, when to call our clinics, and how to help protect yourself from serious illness.

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, and 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 and watery to thick and 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.

Common timeframe for symptoms to improve:

- **Cold and flu symptoms usually get better on their own within 7 days.**
- Commonly, a fever will last 2-4 days.
- A sore throat may last 5 days.
- Runny nose and congestion may last up to 2 weeks.
- A cough may last 3 weeks or more.

Most upper respiratory tract infections are viral, and do not require or get better with antibiotics.

Symptom Management

Unfortunately, there are no medicines that can cure a cold. 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](#)

Booking an appointment with us

If after reviewing the resources above you feel you need to see us, please call to book an appointment. If your doctor or nurse practitioner 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 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.

Protect yourself from getting sick

You can reduce your risk of infection by washing your hands frequently, wearing a mask when indoors and in crowded public spaces, and staying home when you are sick. Taking these precautions will help reduce the spread of illness and keep everyone safe.

Starting in November, masks will be worn by our clinical team members. All patients are encouraged to wear a mask when in our clinics to help reduce the spread of illness.

We also strongly encourage that all eligible patients 6 months of age and older receive the COVID and influenza (flu) vaccine. Adults 75 years of age and older, can receive a RSV vaccine

without a prescription. Infants born on or after April 1, 2025 are also eligible and encouraged to get a RSV immunization to help protect them this viral season.

We have influenza and RSV vaccines in our clinics. Vaccine supplies vary, so please let our clerical team know at the time of booking to help ensure we have supply for your visit.

You can get your COVID and flu vaccine at a community [pharmacy](#).

Take care and be well,
SMHAFHT Leadership Team

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 – and if it is available.



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, sports drinks 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.