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# THE NORTH COUNTRY HEALTH EFFECT

A health & safety guide brought to you by the Clinton County Health Department.



## Respiratory viral illnesses

**R**espiratory viruses are viruses that cause illnesses in the respiratory system and lungs. These illnesses share similar symptoms, risk factors, and prevention strategies. Every year, respiratory viruses such as influenza (flu), COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) cause hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths.

## Prevent respiratory viral illnesses

In the U.S., we have more tools than ever before to help people protect themselves, their families, and communities from severe respiratory illnesses. Core prevention strategies include:

- Stay up to date with immunizations.
- Practice good hygiene (see page 3 for more).
- Take steps for cleaner air.
- When you may have a respiratory virus:
  - Use precautions to prevent spread.
  - Seek health care promptly for testing and/or treatment if you have risk factors for severe illness; treatment may help lower your risk of severe illness.

Additional prevention strategies include: wearing masks, physical distancing, and testing.

## Key times for prevention strategies

- Respiratory viruses are causing a lot of illness in your community.
- You or the people around you were recently exposed to a respiratory virus, are sick, or are recovering.
- You or the people around you have risk factors for severe illness.
- If you are unsure about the health condition or risk status of those around you, the most protective option is choosing to use additional prevention strategies, like masking, physical distancing, and testing.

## Common respiratory viral illnesses

- Flu
- COVID-19
- RSV
- Adenovirus
- Rhinovirus/Enterovirus (common cold)
- Parainfluenza
- Parvovirus B19 (Fifth Disease)

## Symptoms

Respiratory viruses can cause symptoms in the upper respiratory tract (the vocal chords and above) and the lower respiratory tract (below the vocal chords). Some viruses also affect the nose, throat and lungs, and can lead to serious lung infections, such as pneumonia.

### Symptoms of respiratory viruses:

- Fever
- Chills
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- New loss of taste or smell
- Headache, muscle or body aches
- Diarrhea
- Weakness

## When to seek emergency care

If you have an emergency warning sign (like trouble breathing or chest pain), seek emergency medical care immediately.



**G**erms are everywhere! They get onto your hands and items you touch throughout the day. Germs can get into your body through your eyes, nose and mouth and make you sick. Studies have shown that handwashing can prevent 1 in 3 diarrhea-related sicknesses and 1 in 5 respiratory infections, such as a cold or flu.

## Other good health habits

- **Avoid close contact with sick people.**
- **Stay home when you're sick.** If you or your child gets sick, stay at home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine (e.g., Tylenol or ibuprofen).
- **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue (or your elbow)** when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue away after use.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.**
- **Routinely clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces and objects at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill (e.g., doorknobs, keyboards, phones).
- **Practice good health habits.** Stay smoke-free, eat nutritious foods, drink plenty of fluids, stay active, manage stress and get enough sleep.

## Treatment

Seek health care right away for testing and/or treatment if you believe you may have a respiratory virus (if you feel sick or tested positive for one) and you have risk factors for severe illness. If you have flu or COVID-19, treatment may be an option to make your symptoms less severe and shorten the time you are sick. Treatment needs to be started within a few days of when your symptoms begin.

Why not antibiotics? Antibiotics are used to treat infections caused by bacteria, not viruses. They do not work on viruses and the side effects could cause harm.



## Wash your hands

Washing your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water is one of the most important steps you can take to get rid of germs and avoid spreading them. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Key times to wash your hands include:

- Before and after caring for someone who is sick.
- Before and after treating a wound.
- Before and after eating or preparing food.
- After touching an animal, animal food, treats, cages or feces (poop).
- After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- After using the bathroom, changing a diaper or helping a child use the bathroom.
- After touching something dirty or greasy.
- After touching garbage.



## What's the best way to prevent seasonal flu?

- Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older.
- Flu vaccines are updated yearly to better match the viruses spreading in the community. After getting the flu vaccine, it takes about 2 weeks for your body to develop antibodies that will protect you from flu.
- A flu vaccination does not guarantee protection against flu. Some people who get vaccinated might still get sick. However, people who get a flu vaccine are less likely to experience severe illness or to be hospitalized from the flu than people who do not get vaccinated.
- Don't like shots? The nasal spray flu vaccine is an option for people aged 2-49 years who are otherwise healthy and not pregnant.

For more health & safety tips, visit [www.clintonhealth.org/nchealtheffect](http://www.clintonhealth.org/nchealtheffect) or scan the QR code.



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Information in this guide was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)); and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH, [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov)).