Respiratory infections in adults and children: What you should know and do

COVID-19, influenza (flu), cold, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), measles



- What you should know
- What to do to protect yourself and other people
- What to do if you have symptoms
- See also
- Français

What you should know

These infections are all caused by viruses that affect the respiratory system (nose, throat and lungs).

What are the symptoms (which can vary from person to person)?

COVID-19	INFLUENZA (FLU)	INFLUENZA (FLU)	RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)	MEASLES INFECTION
• Fever • Cough • Sore throat • Runny nose • Fatigue • Difficulty breathing • Headache • Stomach ache • Vomiting • Diarrhea • Muscle pain • Difficulty smelling or tasting	• Fever with chills • Cough • Sore throat • Runny nose • Fatigue • Difficulty breathing • Headache • Stomach ache • Vomiting • Muscle and joint pain	• Runny nose • Watery eyes • Coughing or sneezing • Sore throat • Headache	• Runny nose • Watery eyes • Cough • Sore throat • Headache • Fever • Difficulty breathing	• Fever • Cough • Runny nose • Red, watery eyes • Eyes sensitive to light • Rash on the body • Small white spots in the mouth

For more information

COVID-19

- The number of symptoms and their intensity vary considerably from person to person.
- Infected children usually have few symptoms, but some will need medical attention.

Influenza (Flu)

- In general, influenza makes people sicker than a cold does. Symptoms often develop quickly, including chills.
- In general, the influenza virus isn't active in summer.

Cold

- Colds can be caused by a number of viruses.
- Usually, a cold isn't serious and doesn't cause fever.

RSV

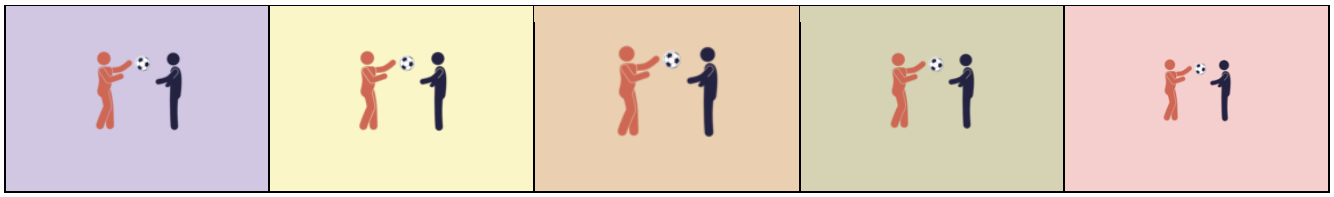
- Many children's first RSV infection occurs in the first year of life.
- The antibody injection (protection against RSV) given to young babies reduces the risk of serious infection during the first few months of life. See the section "Is there a vaccine?"
- The infection is often unrecognized in adults since the symptoms are similar to those of a cold.

Measles

- Red spots or a rash on the body develop 2 to 7 days after symptoms appear.

How does the virus spread?

 COVID-19	 INFLUENZA (FLU)	COLD	RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)	 MEASLES INFECTION
Droplets An infected person who coughs, talks or sneezes can project small droplets that contain the virus. The virus can travel a short distance (less than 2 metres or 6 feet) and infect another person nearby.				
				
Airborne transmission Some viruses stay in the air and can travel a distance of over 2 metres (6 feet) before another person inhales them.				
				
Direct contact The virus can spread when you touch an infected person (e.g., via a handshake).				
				
Indirect contact The virus can spread when you touch surfaces or objects contaminated by an infected person and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes.				



People infected with these viruses can be contagious without knowing it (symptoms haven't appeared yet or they have few or no symptoms) and spread the infection.

For more information

- Cold weather does not cause respiratory infections. These infections are more common in fall and winter because viruses are transmitted more easily in closed, poorly-ventilated spaces. People spend more time in closed spaces when the weather is colder.

Is it very contagious?

COVID-19	INFLUENZA (FLU)	COLD	RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)	MEASLES INFECTION
				

The estimated number of people who can get infected by a single sick person is a good indication of how contagious a virus is. The higher the number, the faster the infection spreads among the population. Vaccination decreases this number, which can vary, especially with regard to COVID-19 and its variants.

For more information

COVID-19

- There are many variants of this virus, which can have different characteristics (e.g., some variants are more contagious).

Measles

- The measles are extremely contagious and can be severe.

What are the risks of complications and possible complications?

ADULT

COVID-19	INFLUENZA (FLU)	COLD	RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)	MEASLES INFECTION
*Risks of complications**				
Low for healthy adults under 60 years of age For unvaccinated individuals : higher than with influenza, RSV or colds	Low for healthy adults under 75 years of age	Very low.	Low for healthy adults under 60 years of age	High for pregnant people not adequately vaccinated or people with weakened immune
Possible complications				
Lung infection Possible damage to several organs (e.g., heart, brain, kidneys) Clogged blood vessels Long COVID** Respiratory failure	Lung infection Possible damage to muscles and several organs (e.g., heart, brain) Sinus infection Respiratory failure Death	Lung infection (rare) Sinus infection Ear infection	Lung infection Sinus infection Ear infection Respiratory failure Death	Lung infection Inflammation of the brain and brain damage For pregnant people: risk of premature labour or low-birth-weight baby Ear infection Death

COVID-19	INFLUENZA (FLU)	COLD	RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)	MEASLES INFECTION
Death				

*Immune systems are weaker during pregnancy. Pregnant people are at a higher risk of getting certain respiratory infections and developing complications.

**Long COVID: Symptoms that appear or persist for 12 weeks or more after becoming infected with the COVID-19 virus. Long COVID is also called Post-COVID-19 condition.

Some people infected with these viruses have a higher-than-average risk of complications, depending on their age and health status.

Some complications are not listed here.

CHILD

COVID-19	INFLUENZA (FLU)	COLD	RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)	MEASLES INFECTION
Risks of complications				
Low for healthy children	Higher than with COVID-19. Low for healthy children aged 5 years and over	Very low	High for babies under 6 months of age	High for children who haven't been adequately vaccinated, are under 12 months old or have weakened immune systems

COVID-19	INFLUENZA (FLU)	COLD	RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)	MEASLES INFECTION
Possible complications				
Lung infection Possible damage to several organs (e.g. heart, digestive system) Long COVID* Respiratory failure Death	Lung infection Possible damage to muscles and several organs (e.g., heart, brain) Ear infection Sinus infection Respiratory failure Death	Lung infection (rare) Sinus infection Ear infection	Bronchiolitis or lung infection Ear infection Respiratory failure Death	Lung infection Inflammation of the brain and brain damage Ear infection Persistent diarrhea Death

*Long COVID: Symptoms that appear or persist for 12 weeks or more after becoming infected with the COVID-19 virus. Long COVID is also called Post-COVID-19 condition.

Some children infected with these viruses have a higher-than-average risk of complications, depending on their age and health status.

Some complications are not listed here.

For more information

RSV

- This virus causes many hospitalizations in babies.

Is there a vaccine?

COVID-19	INFLUENZA (FLU)	COLD	RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS (RSV)	MEASLES INFECTION
Yes. The number of doses varies depending on a person's age and health status.[1] Can be received starting at 6 months of age.	Yes. A yearly vaccine. Recommended under certain circumstances. [2] Can be received starting at 6 months of age.	No.	**For children:** No. An injection of antibodies (defense against the virus) is recommended and free for young babies and under certain circumstances, for prevention. [3] **For adults:** Yes. Recommended under certain conditions.[3]	Yes. 2 doses, ideally at 12 and 18 months of age, for good lifetime protection. [4]

To book an appointment to get vaccinated: Clic Santé.

[1]. COVID-19 vaccination

[2]. Flu vaccination

[3]. Immunization against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infections

[4]. Measles, mumps and rubella vaccine

For more information

COVID-19

- Vaccination reduces risks of complications and hospitalization. This is the best way to protect yourself from the virus.

Influenza (Flu)

- Influenza viruses change from year to year. Vaccines are based on active influenza viruses in the world during the preceding months.
- Protection provided by the vaccine varies from one year to the next.

RSV - Children

- Antibodies will not prevent an RSV infection, but they will greatly reduce the risk of complications and hospitalization in the event of one.

Measles

- Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from the virus. Two doses provide over 95% protection from infections.

What to do to protect yourself and other people

	Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent many infectious diseases.
	Wash your hands often, especially when you cough, sneeze or blow your nose.
	Sneeze and cough into your elbow or a tissue. Throw your tissue in a garbage can.
	Wash and disinfect surfaces and objects that are handled often (e.g., doorknobs, tables).
	Air out rooms often.
	Wearing a mask is still a good practice: • For people who have symptoms of a respiratory infectious disease (e,g. cough, sore throat or nasal congestion), except children under school age • For people with weakened immune systems • For people who have health conditions that increase vulnerability • For pregnant people • In the presence of people who are vulnerable due to their health status or their age (60 and over) • In the presence of babies under 3 months old, except for immediate family members • In the presence of people who have a respiratory infection For more information: Québec.ca

What to do if you have symptoms?

Also applicable in the event of a positive COVID-19 test.

	**Fever** • Stay home.		**Cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, runny nose** • Wear a mask (except children under school age).

If you are a vulnerable individual (e.g., older adult or individual with a chronic illness)

- Contact Info Santé 811. A nurse will give you advice.

For 10 days after symptoms appear:

- Keep a distance of 1 to 2 metres (3 to 6 feet) from other people, if possible.
- Avoid coming into contact with vulnerable individuals (e.g., older people, individuals with a chronic illness or a weakened immune system). If not possible, wear a mask (except children under school age).
- Avoid outings (e.g., restaurant, cinemas).
- Work from home, if possible.
- Tell your family and friends that you are sick.
- For some respiratory infections, such as the measles, the Direction régionale de santé publique de Montréal will recommend that the sick person stays at home in isolation for a certain time.

Is your child ill?
For advice, call 811 and choose option 1.
Telephone service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's free and confidential.
The pediatric line is for parents of children aged from 0 to 17.

See also:
- Finding a health resource : Québec.ca
- Infections chez l'enfant : Quand et où consulter? (English section)
- When should you seek emergency care? In 16 languages, Montreal Children's Hospital

See also:

- Infections respiratoires, parents de jeunes enfants et femmes enceintes : les bons gestes à adopter! (English section)
- Coqueluche (English section)
- COVID-19

- Flu (influenza)
- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infections
- Measles

See also

- Respiratory infections, parents oy young children and pregrant woman: good pratices to adopt! (PDF)
- Vaccination for children: don't miss it!
- COVID-19
- Flu (influenza)
- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infections
- Measles

Français

- Infections respiratoires chez l'adulte et chez l'enfant : Quoi savoir et quoi faire?

Content developed by the DRSP in collaboration with the PCI team of the CHU Sainte-Justine