

# Your child's respiratory virus infection and how we manage it

## **What is a respiratory infection?**

Respiratory infections are infections of the upper and lower respiratory tract, which includes the nose, throat, ears, sinuses (small air-filled holes behind your cheekbones and forehead) and the lungs. They are most commonly caused by viruses but can also be caused by bacteria. This leaflet will provide information on respiratory virus infections only.

Respiratory virus infections cause colds and flu, and affect both children and adults. They occur most commonly in the winter months from October to March.

The symptoms of respiratory viruses include runny or congested nose, earache, sneezing, cough, rapid breathing, and possible malaise (feeling weak), fever and chills.

## **How do we test for respiratory viruses?**

The same respiratory virus can affect people differently. Therefore, if your child is admitted with a suspected respiratory virus infection, we take two swabs from them. We send these to our laboratory team, who will try and identify the virus concerned.

The swabs are taken from your child's nose and the back of their throat. This can be uncomfortable but enables us to get a good sample for diagnosis.

In areas like children's intensive care, other samples like sputum (phlegm) or bronchial washings may also be taken for investigation.

## What types of respiratory viruses are there?

Our laboratory does a test that looks for a wide range of respiratory viruses, including:

- influenza (flu)
- respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)
- parainfluenza viruses
- adenoviruses
- enteroviruses
- rhinoviruses
- coronaviruses.

## Why is my child in a respiratory virus bay?

During winter, the number of children admitted with symptoms of respiratory viruses far exceeds the number of single rooms we have to isolate infections. Therefore, we have to prioritise which infections need a single room and this will depend on the risk of the infection spreading to others.

Influenza is considered very infectious, and a more serious infection. A child with suspected or confirmed flu is isolated in a single room if possible.

Children with any other respiratory viruses may also be cared for in a single room. However, in winter it is likely they will be cared for in a bay, called a **cohort**, with other children who are affected by a range of respiratory viruses.

## **What else do we do to prevent the spread of respiratory virus infections?**

When a child coughs or sneezes, the virus rapidly falls onto the bed, chair, and floor.

To prevent any cross infection (transfer of virus between people) all staff who are caring for your child are expected to have received their annual flu jab and to practice excellent hygiene. This includes hand washing or using the hand sanitiser, before and after contact with your child, as well as using gloves and aprons.

We also ask that parents and carers follow the hygiene advice detailed below. Please speak to a member of staff if you have any questions.

## **What can I do to prevent the spread of respiratory virus infections?**

We ask that all parents and carers follow the instructions from the ward staff about good hand hygiene.

Please use the hand sanitiser at the ward entrance every time you enter and leave the ward. Also, if you are changing nappies or assisting your child on the toilet, please wash your hands or use the hand sanitiser after each nappy change or toilet visit.

Please also encourage your child to wash their hands after going to the toilet and before meal times, and advise family not to visit if they are unwell themselves.

## Hand hygiene

Whether you use soap and water, or the hand sanitiser, it is important to clean your hands thoroughly.

Please follow the steps shown in the diagram below to help stop the spread of these common infections. These guidelines are also on all of our dispensers for reference.



Image reproduced with permission from Deb Ltd

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about respiratory virus infections, please contact the infection prevention and control team on **t:** 020 7188 3153 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## Further information

### Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am-5pm

**e:** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)

**e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

**Leaflet number: 4164/VER2**

Date published: January 2019

Review date: January 2022

© 2019 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

A list of sources is available on request