

Managing your child's respiratory virus (including COVID-19)

Respiratory infection

A respiratory infection is one in the upper and lower respiratory tract, which includes the nose, throat, ears, sinuses and the lungs. They are most commonly caused by viruses, but can be caused by bacteria. This leaflet only gives information on respiratory virus infections.

Respiratory virus infections cause colds and flu, and affect children and adults. They are most common from October to March.

The symptoms of respiratory viruses include:

- runny or congested nose
- earache
- sneezing
- cough
- rapid breathing
- generally feeling ill or weak
- fever and chills

COVID-19 (coronavirus) can present with similar symptoms, but can also cause a loss of smell or taste.

Testing for respiratory viruses

The same respiratory virus can affect people differently. If your child is admitted with a suspected respiratory virus infection, we take 2 swabs from them. We send these to our laboratory, who try and identify the virus.

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

In areas such as children's intensive care, other samples (for example sputum (phlegm) or bronchial washings) might also be taken.

All inpatients are tested for COVID-19 throughout their stay.

The accompanying parent or carer, is also required to have a lateral flow test (LFT). Currently, hospital wards are testing parents and carers 2 times a week using an LFT.

Types of respiratory viruses

Our laboratory test for lots of respiratory viruses, including:

- influenza (flu)
- respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)
- parainfluenza viruses
- adenoviruses
- enteroviruses
- rhinoviruses
- parechovirus
- corona viruses including COVID-19

Respiratory virus bays

During a peak of coughs and colds in the community, the number of children admitted with symptoms of respiratory viruses is higher than the number of single rooms we have to isolate infections. We have to prioritise which infections need a single room. This depends on the risk of the infection spreading.

Children with respiratory viruses might also be cared for in a single room or a Rediroom (isolation tent).

During a peak of respiratory viruses they will probably be cared for in a bay (cohort), with other children who are affected by a range of respiratory viruses.

If you or your child has flu or COVID-19, you will be isolated in a single room or Rediroom.

Preventing infections spreading

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 care for your child are expected to have received their yearly flu and COVID-19 vaccinations and to practice excellent hygiene.

This includes handwashing (or using the hand sanitiser) before and after contact with your child. It also includes using a facemask, eye protection, gloves and aprons.

You will see clear plastic screens between beds on the ward. The screens are a barrier to stop respiratory particles spreading from patient to patient in the atmosphere.

What you can do

Parents and carers are encouraged to wear a face mask when they leave their child's bedside. This will help reduce any asymptomatic spread of respiratory viruses.

All parents and carers should follow hygiene instructions from the ward staff.

Use hand sanitiser or wash your hands with soap and water:

- every time you enter and leave the ward
- if you are changing nappies or assisting your child on the toilet
- after each nappy change or toilet visit

Please make sure your child washes their hands after going to the toilet and before meal times. Also, tell visitors not to come to the hospital if they are unwell.

Hand hygiene

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

Follow the steps shown in the diagram on the next page to help stop the spread of these common infections. These guidelines are also on all of our dispensers.

Contact us

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

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web** www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets



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