

Frontline healthcare fact sheet

Respiratory viruses in the healthcare setting

What are respiratory viruses?

Respiratory viruses are germs that can cause many illnesses like COVID-19, flu (influenza), the common cold, and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus).

How do respiratory viruses spread?

Respiratory viruses are usually spread through breathing in air that has infected droplets in it from another person breathing, coughing, or sneezing. They can also spread through indirect contact by touching objects that have respiratory droplets on them.

What are the signs and symptoms of respiratory virus infections?

Respiratory viruses can have a variety of symptoms including:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath/wheezing
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Fever
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Body aches

Who is most at risk?

Anyone can get a respiratory virus, but some people are more likely to have a severe reaction or outcome. Those most at risk for severe illness include older adults, young children, people with

weakened immune systems, and pregnant people.

How are respiratory viruses treated?

Antibiotics do not work on viruses, but other medications may help make your symptoms less severe or shorten the amount of time you are sick. Talk to your healthcare provider for more information about treatment and testing.

What actions can prevent the spread of respiratory viruses in my facility?

Handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of viruses. Using a tissue, coughing and sneezing into the elbow, and staying home when sick can also limit spread. Getting the flu and COVID vaccines can protect you and others.

Wearing a mask can also prevent the spread of respiratory viruses. In some cases you may need to wear additional personal protective equipment (PPE) like a gown, gloves, and eye protection when you care for a resident/patient. It is also important to clean frequently touched places like doorknobs, light switches, phones, and keyboards.

Where can I get more information?

- [CDC Prevent spread of respiratory virus in healthcare settings](#)