If You Get Sick:
Managing Colds, RSV, Flu and COVID-19

Information is current as of September 15, 2023

How can I tell if I have the flu, COVID-19 or RSV?

It is difficult to tell what the cause of respiratory symptoms is without testing. No matter what the cause of your illness is, most people should self-isolate and manage symptoms with simple things like rest, lots of fluids and over-the-counter medications.

If you think you might have the flu, antiviral medications are recommended if you are at higher risk of serious illness based on age or health conditions. Flu antivirals work best when they are started within two days of getting sick. If you are higher risk, don't delay in reaching out to your doctor about this medication.

If you think you might have COVID-19, you can **access rapid antigen tests** (RATs) for COVID-19 at a pharmacy or through your public health unit. Get a good sample by swabbing your cheeks, throat, and nostrils. **Instructions in multiple languages are available on Ontario Health's website.** If you test negative, take a second test at least 24 hours later to be most confident in the result.

COVID-19 **PCR tests** are available for people at risk of severe illness. If you get sick, seek out testing as soon as possible. You may be eligible for antiviral medications, which must be taken within the first 5-7 days of your symptoms starting (depending on the treatment).

Use this **screening tool** to find out where to get tested and how to access medications.

Stop the Spread

The flu, COVID-19 and RSV are all very contagious. You can spread these respiratory illnesses for up to 10 days after starting to feel sick. To prevent spread, stay at home until you have no fever and symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if you are vomiting and/or experiencing diarrhea).

You should also take extra precautions for 10 days, including wearing a mask in public spaces and avoiding visiting friends and family who are at higher risk of serious illness. **Follow this advice for any respiratory illness, whether you have tested for COVID-19 or not.**

Ontario's Ministry of Health has more information on **protecting yourself and your loved ones from respiratory viruses and what to do if you get sick**.

Here are doctor-approved tipsheets to help you manage your illness at home and understand when to seek medical attention: **Family Doctor Tips for Teens and Adults with Colds, the Flu or COVID-19** and **Family Doctor Tips on Caring for Children with Respiratory Symptoms** (available in 13 languages).
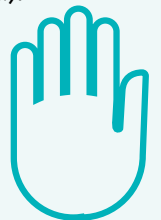
If you are struggling to care for yourself or a family member, don't hesitate to call your family doctor or seek medical attention. If you are asked to wear a mask when you come to visit the doctor, please do so to protect other patients and staff.

You can also call 811 to speak with a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Ontario College of
Family Physicians