**Respiratory viral infections:**

**Influenza, COVID, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)**



**What is a respiratory viral infection?**

Respiratory viral infections occur every year, usually in the winter.  They are highly infectious respiratory diseases caused by a number of coronavirus, flu or respiratory viruses. The most likely viruses that will cause RSV, flu and COVID each year are identified in advance and vaccines are then produced to closely match them.

**Isn’t flu, COVID and RSV just a heavy cold?**

No. Colds are much less serious and usually start gradually with a stuffy or runny nose and a sore throat.

**How do I know when I’ve got a respiratory viral infection?**

Flu symptoms hit you suddenly and sometimes severely. They usually include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles, and you can often get a cough and sore throat at the same time.  COVID and RSV symptoms range and can be mild like a cold but can also be more severe and include fever.  These infections are caused by viruses and not bacteria, so antibiotics won’t treat it.

**What harm can respiratory viral infections do?**

People sometimes think a bad cold is flu or COVID, but having flu or COVID can be much worse than a cold and you may need to stay in bed for a few days, especially if you have flu. Some people are more susceptible to the effects of respiratory viruses. For them it can increase the risk of developing more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia or can make existing conditions worse.

**How are respiratory viruses spread?**

Respiratory viruses are spread easily from person to person via the respiratory secretions produced when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes.  They can also be spread through hand-to-face contact after touching a person or surface contaminated with the virus.

**How to prevent spread?**

**At home**: Catch it, bin it, kill it – sneeze into tissues, put the tissue in a bin and then wash you hands. Try and stay away from public events and gatherings while you are symptomatic. Also if you are eligible, **make sure you have your RSV, flu and COVID vaccination.**

**Who is eligible?**

**It is recommended that the following groups have the seasonal flu vaccine:**

**From 1 September 2024**:

* pregnant women
* all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2024
* primary school aged children (from Reception to Year 6)
* secondary school aged children (from Year 7 to Year 11)
* all children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to less than 18 years

**From October 2024**

* those aged 65 or over
* those in long-stay residential care homes
* carers in receipt of carer’s allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly person/disabled person of any age
* close contacts of immunocompromised individuals
* frontline workers in a social care setting without an employer led occupational health scheme including those working for a registered care or nursing home, registered domiciliary care providers, voluntary managed hospice providers and those that are employed by those who receive direct payments (personal budgets) or Personal Health budgets, such as Personal Assistants
* everyone under 65 years of age with one of the following conditions (including children, and babies of six months and older) listed in the Green Book, Chapter 19 – summary below:
	+ diabetes
	+ a heart problem
	+ a chest complaint such as bronchitis or emphysema
	+ a kidney disease
	+ a liver disease
	+ lowered immunity due to disease or treatment
	+ a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA)
	+ a neurological condition, for example multiple sclerosis (MS)
	+ a problem with your spleen, for example sickle cell disease, or you have had your spleen removed.

**It is recommended that the following groups have the RSV vaccine:**

People aged 75 to 79 years old on 1 September 2024 will be invited to receive their RSV vaccination, and those turning 75 after this date will also receive an invitation from the practice. [Click here for more information on RSV](https://assets.practice365.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/85/2024/08/PIL-RSVvaccineforadults14_WEB.pdf)

Women that are at least 28 weeks pregnant should speak to their maternity service or GP surgery to get the vaccine to protect their baby.

**It is recommended that the following groups have the Covid-19 vaccine:**

We are awaiting further information and will update in due course.

**The practice will start sending invitations in August for planned vaccination clinics in September & October for RSV, Covid-19 and Flu vaccinations.**

**Flu vaccinations for eligible patients have been purchased by the practice already; so please book in when invited to prevent financial loss to the practice.**

**I had the seasonal flu / COVID vaccinations last year; do I need more vaccinations this year?**

We do not know how long last year’s vaccination will last and for this reason we strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year.

**Will I get any side effects?**

There are some fairly common but mild side effects. Some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards, and your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected. Any other reactions are very rare.

**Will it protect me completely?**

Most people will be protected against RSV, flu and COVID by having the vaccinations. And while the vaccines do not give 100 per cent protection, if you have the vaccination and still go on to get a flu or COVID you are much less likely to have serious complications.

**How long will I be protected for?**

The vaccines should provide protection throughout the forthcoming winter season.

**For further information please click the links below:**

RSV: [National RSV vaccination programme announced - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-rsv-vaccination-programme-announced)

Seasonal Influenza: [National flu immunisation programme 2024 to 2025 letter - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flu-immunisation-programme-plan-2024-to-2025/national-flu-immunisation-programme-2024-to-2025-letter)

Covid-19: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-spring-2024-and-future-vaccination-programmes-jcvi-advice-4-december-2023/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-in-spring-2024-and-considerations-on-future-covid-19-vaccination-4-december-2023#considerations-on-future-covid-19-vaccination-programmes-beyond-spring-2024>

Green Book, Chapter 19: [Influenza: the green book, chapter 19 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/influenza-the-green-book-chapter-19)