Winter Illness

Self-Care Forum
Helping people take care of themselves

SELF-CARE FORUM FACT SHEET NO 26

GET READY

- **R** – Remember to plan
- **E** – Energy & warmth
- **A** – Ask your pharmacy team
- **D** – Diet & nutrition
- **Y** – You matter!

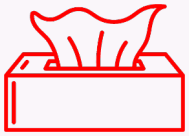
Winter illnesses are usually not serious but they can make us feel very unwell. This fact sheet will help you manage winter ailments such as coughs, colds and sore throats. See also our winter wellness fact sheet for advice on keeping well during winter.

Useful facts

As the weather gets colder, it can make some health problems worse, such as asthma, COPD and other respiratory diseases, and lead to severe complications, especially for those more at risk in our communities, such as:

• people aged 65 and over • people with long-term conditions • babies and children under 5 • people on a low income (so cannot afford heating) • people with a disability • pregnant women • people who have a mental health condition.

Colds



Symptoms: Symptoms of a cold are different from flu because they develop slowly and include a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, coughing, sore throat and a slight fever and can last up to 10 days and coughs linked to them can last up to 3 weeks. Colds are generally harmless infections that get better in time without the need to visit the surgery.

What can I do? It is important you rest, eat healthily and drink lots of fluids. Paracetamol or ibuprofen can help with symptoms, your pharmacy team can help with symptom relief advice.

When to seek help: Call your surgery or NHS111 in England & Wales, Phone First in NI or NHS24 in Scotland if you have: a very high temperature or you feel hot and shivery • a long term medical condition, such as diabetes, or a heart, lung or kidney condition • a weakened immune system – for example, because of chemotherapy • chest pain • blood when you cough • difficulty breathing • swelling of the glands in your neck or armpits • symptoms lasting over 3 weeks.

Sore Throat



Symptoms: Symptoms of a sore throat include a painful throat, especially when swallowing or a dry, scratchy throat. Symptoms last 7 days without any treatment. Most sore throats are caused by viruses and don#t usually need antibiotics.

What can I do? Suck lozenges, ice cubes or ice lollies – but do not give lozenges or hard sweets to young children • eat soft or cool foods • gargling with warm salty water can help reduce swelling and pain (children should not try this) • avoid smoking and smoky places • drink plenty of water • take pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen • if you need further advice on pain relief speak to your pharmacy team.

When to seek help: Call your surgery or NHS111 in England & Wales, Phone First in NI or NHS24 in Scotland if: symptoms last more than 10-14 days, or get worse • you have a sore throat and a very high temperature, or you feel hot and shivery • you have problems swallowing and severe pain • you feel dehydrated, particularly if you are not drinking enough or passing less urine that usual • you have a weakened immune system.

Cough



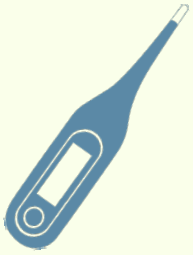
Symptoms: Coughing is common. 1 in 5 people will get a cough in winter. Symptoms can last up to 3 weeks, but in some cases can last up to 8 weeks.

What can I do? People often use over-the-counter cough medicines, home made remedies such as hot water with juice from a lemon and a teaspoon of honey can also help (not suitable for babies under 1).

When to seek help: Call your surgery or NHS111 in England & Wales, Phone First in NI or NHS24 in Scotland if you have: • a cough lasting more than 3 weeks • chest or shoulder pain • blood when you cough • are breathless • have weight loss for no reason over the last 6 months • hoarseness (a croaky or changed voice) for longer than 3 weeks that continues once the cough is better • new lumps or swellings around your neck and above your collarbones.

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Flu



Symptoms: For most people flu can cause unpleasant symptoms, but if you are in the "at risk" group flu can cause severe illness. Symptoms of flu develop quickly and include: a high temperature • aches and pains • tiredness • a headache • a dry chesty cough, particularly if it is dry or painful.

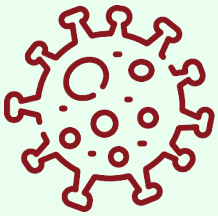
What can I do? The flu vaccine is the safest and most effective way to help protect against flu. It will also help reduce the risk of spreading flu to others.

Rest, keep warm and drink plenty of water. Stay at home until you feel well enough to return to normal activities. Paracetamol or ibuprofen can help with aches and pains and bring down a fever. Antibiotics do not work on flu.

Flu spreads through the air when you cough or sneeze. It can spread when you touch surfaces where the virus has landed, then touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Washing your hands and wiping surfaces regularly can help stop the spread.

When to seek help: Call your surgery or NHS111 in England & Wales, Phone First in NI or NHS24 in Scotland if you or your child has flu and: you are worried about your baby's or child's symptoms • symptoms do not improve after 7 days • you are over 65 • you are pregnant • you have a long-term condition, such as diabetes or a condition that affects your heart, lungs, kidneys, brain or nerves • you have a weakened immune system – for example, from chemotherapy.

COVID-19



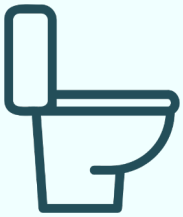
Symptoms: It is still important to be mindful of coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, which are the same for adults and children, similar to cold and flu and can include: diarrhoea • feeling sick or being sick • aches and pains • blocked or runny nose • high temperature • cough • loss or change to your sense of smell or taste • shortness of breath • feeling tired, or exhausted • headache • sore throat • not feeling like eating.

What can I do? Most people no longer need to take a coronavirus test. If you are eligible, it is important to be up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations. Check the NHS website to see if you are eligible for vaccinations.

Most people with COVID can recover at home, if you think you have COVID: • drink lots of fluids • rest • take pain relief such as paracetamol • antibiotics will not help • stay at home and avoid contact with others if you have coronavirus symptoms and you have a high temperature, or do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities.

When to seek help: Call your surgery if: • your symptoms worsen • you're worried about your symptoms • you have symptoms that you can no longer manage at home • you're worried about your child, especially if under 2 years. If your surgery is closed, call NHS111 if you live in England or Wales, NHS24 in Scotland or Phone First in NI. In an emergency phone 999.

Norovirus



Symptoms: Norovirus is also known as 'the winter vomiting bug'.

Symptoms can appear quickly and can include: • vomiting and diarrhoea • a slight fever • headaches • stomach cramps • aching arms and legs.

What can I do? Norovirus is very catching, so: • stay at home and rest • stay away from school or work until 48 hours after diarrhoea or vomiting has stopped • drink lots of water to stay hydrated • take paracetamol for aches and pains • do not prepare food for other people when unwell • wash your hands with soap and water - hand gels do not kill norovirus • do not visit hospitals or care homes when you are unwell • phone your pharmacy for advice on how to relieve your symptoms.

Call your surgery or pharmacy for advice, do not visit. Or call NHS111 in England and Wales, NHS24 in Scotland or Phone First in NI.

When to seek help: Call your surgery if: • there is blood in your diarrhoea • your symptoms haven't improved after a few days • you have a serious health condition, such as kidney disease.

Where to find more information

We have a range of fact sheets to help you manage common illnesses, offer advice on health and wellbeing and inform you on vitamin D. https://www.selfcareforum.org/fact-sheets/

Visit the NHS website in your country: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/seasonal-health/keep-warm-keep-well/ https://www.nhsinform.scot/winter-illness https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/h/article/howtostaywellinwinter https://belfasttrust.hscni.net/healthy-living/winter-health/

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