Handling respiratory illnesses

Last updated: **April 2024**

The peak of the respiratory illness season has passed. However, the SARS CoV-2 virus continues to circulate at lower levels in the community. The protection from infection that COVID-19 vaccines provide decreases over time, particularly in older people, so a spring COVID-19 vaccine booster will ensure people stay protected.

The spring COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for people who are at higher risk of getting seriously sick from COVID-19. The vaccine remains free and available for everyone 6 months and older. The spring booster is available throughout the province at pharmacies, regional health-authority clinics, some primary-care offices, and community health centres.

How can I prevent respiratory illnesses?

Vaccinations remain the best defense against COVID-19. You should receive all doses you are eligible for and encourage friends and family to do the same. Both health care workers and the public can book COVID vaccinations through the Get Vaccinated system.

Beyond vaccinations, we can all help prevent the spread of respiratory illness by:

1. Staying at home if you feel unwell and try to avoid spending time with people at higher risk of serious illness

2. Practicing respiratory etiquette: Wear a mask in crowded public spaces, and cough and sneeze into your elbow

3. Cleaning your hands regularly

4. Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, mouth and nose

Making a decision to seek care

The Emergency Room (ER) in hospitals can be very busy. For critical or life-threatening conditions, call **9-1-1** or go to the nearest emergency department. Some examples of emergencies include, but are not limited to:

- Chest pains

- Difficulty breathing

- Severe bleeding

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/more/resources/healthlink-bc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.

- Loss of consciousness

- Broken bones, or suspected broken bones

- Stroke or heart attack symptoms

- Symptoms of sepsis

- Pain in early pregnancy

Babies younger than 3 months of age, with a fever should be assessed by a doctor, their family doctor or an emergency room doctor, as soon as possible. They can get very sick quickly and require an aggressive approach to investigate the underlying cause. To learn more about when to take your child to the emergency room, see:

- BC Children's Hospital: When to bring your child to the BC Children's Emergency Department

- First Nations Health Authority: Respiratory Virus Season: Making Healthy Decisions

- Fraser Health Authority: Parents' guide to knowing your care options

For more information on symptoms and when to seek care, see:

1. When to bring your child to the Emergency Department (BC Children's Hospital) – Additional examples to help families decide if their child needs emergency care

2. HealthLinkBC File #99 How to take a temperature: Children and adults – Information on safe and accurate temperature taking

Common lung disease and respiratory conditions

Learn information about common lung disease and respiratory conditions by visiting our Lung and respiratory conditions page or selecting the specific conditions below:

- Acute bronchitis

- Asthma

- Coronavirus (COVID-19)

- Croup

- Influenza (seasonal flu)

- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infection

- Sinusitis

- Whooping cough (pertussis)

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