



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Respiratory Viral Infections

This information explains respiratory viral infections. These infections can be serious for people who have another illness or a weakened immune system.

Some of the viruses that cause respiratory infections include:

- Adenovirus
- Coronavirus
- Human metapneumovirus
- Parainfluenza virus
- The flu (influenza)
- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)
- Rhinovirus/enterovirus
- Coronavirus (COVID-19)

What are the signs of respiratory viral infections?

If you have a respiratory viral infection, you may have 1 or more of the following signs:

- Fever (a temperature above 100.4° F (38° C), or as directed by your healthcare provider)
- Sore throat
- Chills
- Cough

- Headache
- Runny nose
- Body aches
- Tiredness and general discomfort

How are respiratory viral infections spread?

Respiratory viral infections are spread through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of someone who is infected. The droplets contain the virus and are released into the air when the infected person coughs or sneezes. You can easily inhale (breathe in) the droplets and get an infection.

Respiratory viral infections can also be spread when droplets fall onto furniture, equipment, or other surfaces. If someone touches the surface and then their nose, mouth, or eyes, they may become infected.

What isolation precautions are taken in the hospital if I have a respiratory viral infection?

Isolation precautions are steps we take to stop infections from spreading from person to person. If you're diagnosed with a respiratory viral infection while you're in the hospital:

- You will be placed in a private room.
- A sign will be posted on your door telling all staff to clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before going into and after leaving your room.
- All staff will need to wear a mask, eye protection, yellow gown, and gloves while in your room. These are available outside of your room.
- If you leave your room for tests, you must wear a mask, yellow gown, and gloves.
- You will not be able to walk around your unit, or go to the following areas of the hospital:

- Pantry on your unit
 - Recreation center on M15
 - Pediatric recreation areas on M9
 - Cafeteria
 - Main lobby
 - Any other public area of the hospital.
- You can have art or massage therapy in your room while following isolation precautions.

You can stop following these precautions when you receive treatment and can no longer pass the infection to others.

How can I lower my risk of spreading my respiratory viral infection?

- Ask family members and close friends to get the flu vaccine.
- Always cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow, not your hand.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer often, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Don't share items such as cups, drinking glasses, food utensils, or toys.
- Avoid close contact with others until your symptoms go away.

I have a respiratory viral infection. What should I do when I go to my outpatient appointment?

- When you check in for an appointment, please let the reception staff know if you have symptoms of a respiratory viral infection, such as a fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, or sneezing. They will bring you to a private room, where a nurse will ask you more about your symptoms.

- If you have any symptoms of a respiratory infection, don't sit in the waiting area, eat in the cafeteria, or visit patients who are staying in the hospital.

Where can I get more information about respiratory viral infections?

If you have any questions, speak with your healthcare provider. You can also visit the following websites for more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

New York State Department of Health

www.health.ny.gov

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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