

Fact Sheet

Respiratory Viral Illnesses

What are respiratory viral illnesses (RVIs)?

Commonly known as “the cold” or “the flu”, viral respiratory illnesses (RVI) is a general term for many types of illnesses caused by viruses. This includes respiratory syncytial viruses (RSV), influenza viruses, parainfluenza viruses, adenoviruses, coronaviruses and rhinoviruses. Rhinoviruses are the viruses that cause the common cold.

What are the symptoms?

A person with a RVI may have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Sore throat
- Fever
- Trouble breathing
- Headache
- Sore muscles
- Feeling very tired

These symptoms can last for a few days up to a few weeks!

What does not cause RVIs?

Although the symptoms may be similar, RVIs are not caused by bacteria (for example: group A Streptococcus or pertussis), medicines, vaccines, allergies or other medical conditions. This means that treating the non-virus causes will be different from how RVIs are treated.

How do you get a RVI?

- **Anyone** can get, and spread a RVI
- RVIs can be easily to spread from person to person by respiratory droplets (e.g., droplets released through coughs and sneezes) and by contact with unclean surfaces that may have the respiratory droplets on them (like a tissue that has been sneezed on)
- They can also be spread by the unwashed hands of a person with a RVI. Unwashed hands can spread the virus to other people or onto objects in the environment
- RVIs can be spread in settings where people are in close contact, such as hospitals, personal care homes, large gatherings and crowded public spaces (like shopping malls or sporting events)
- It is possible for a person to spread a RVI for several days **before** they show symptoms
- People can carry and spread germs many days **after** their symptoms have stopped
- Children, people with a weakened immune system, and the elderly are usually most at risk for getting very sick if they get a RVI.

How do I know I have a RVI?

You may be diagnosed by your symptoms. You may be advised as well to get tested, to determine if you have a RVI.

What is the treatment for a RVI?

- Plenty of rest **at home**
- Drink plenty of clear fluids like water, apple juice, or clear broths

- Your primary care provider, like your doctor or nurse practitioner, may prescribe or suggest medicine(s) to help you breathe better or relieve other symptoms. They will probably not prescribe you antibiotics because antibiotics treat bacterial infections, not viral ones.

I don't want to get a RVI or spread a RVI if I have one!

There is a lot you can do to limit the chances of you getting or spreading a RVI.

- Clean your hands! Use either alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
 - Clean them before:
 - Eating, preparing or serving food/drinking drinks
 - Taking or giving medication
 - Touching your face
 - Starting work
 - Clean them after:
 - Using the toilet
 - Coughing or sneezing into your hand
 - Using a tissue
 - You arrive home
 - When to clean your hands isn't limited to this list! You can find more information about cleaning hands on the [Shared Health](#) and [Manitoba Health](#) websites
- Cover your coughs and sneezes
- In public, remember to maintain social (physical) distancing especially if someone is coughing or sneezing around you. Social (physical) distancing works by limiting the number of people that you, and your family, come into close contact (within two metres/ six feet)
- Protect yourself:
 - Get the flu shot yearly! It is the best way to protect against influenza
 - Having the influenza immunization helps protect others too because a person can carry influenza without having symptoms
 - You can get immunization information by calling Health Links-Info Santé at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257, your public health office, or healthcare provider, or by visiting the Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living website at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/flu/where.html>
- ***If you are sick*** stay home! DO NOT go to work, visit people in the hospital, personal care homes or attend social events. When you are home sick, try to stay away from others in your home to help reduce the chance of them getting sick too. Follow Public Health advice for length and types of measures required.