

Protecting your children from becoming unwell this winter



Adapted from UK Health Security Agency blogs, NHS website, and target resources.

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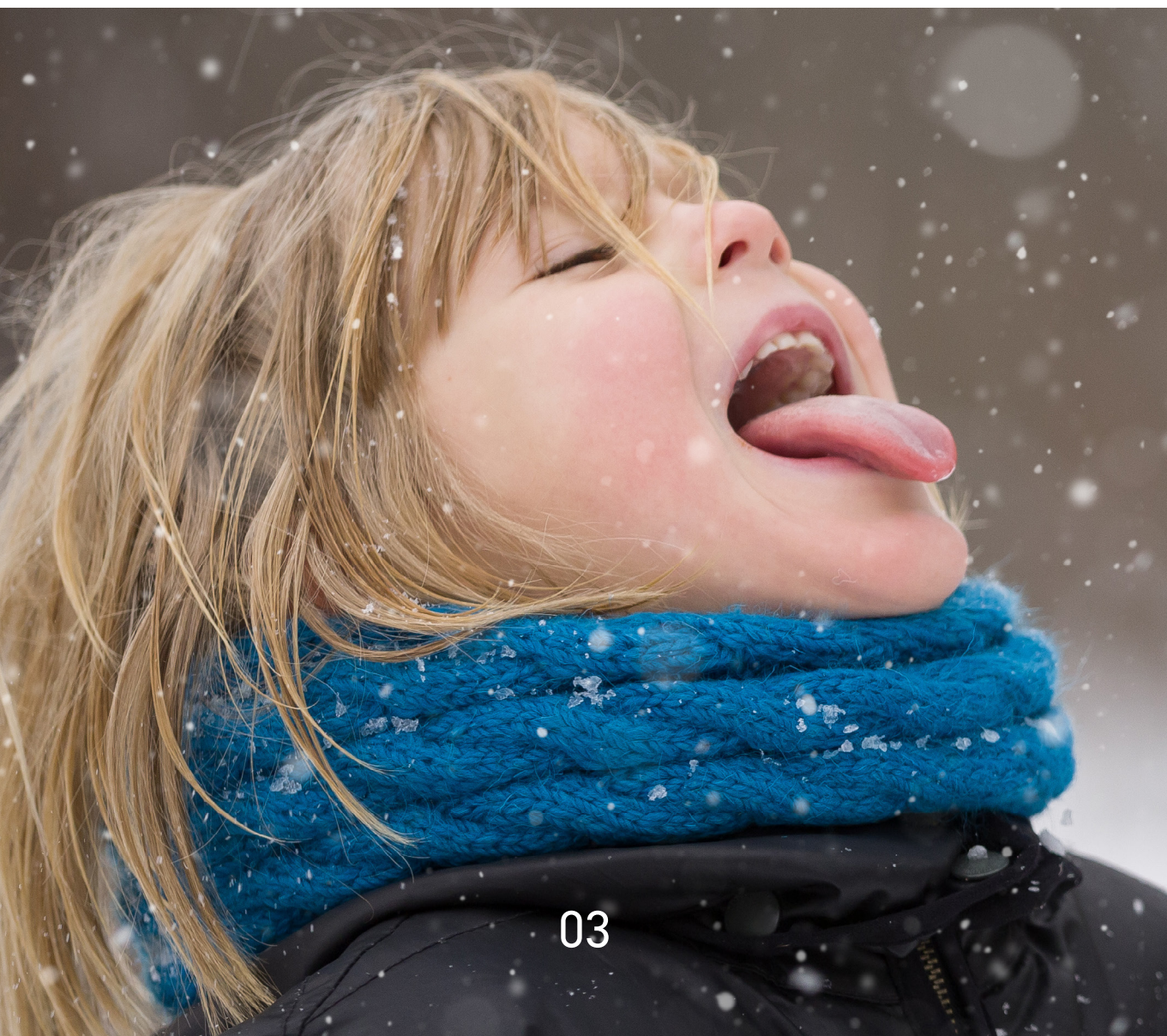
4.1 How long could infections last?

1.0 Introduction

As this is the first winter without pandemic restrictions in two years, you and your children may be more susceptible to the usual winter bugs and viruses this year. Winter bugs and viruses are usually mild, but can sometimes become more serious, particularly in younger children or if an infection spreads to a vulnerable family member.

Here are the top things you can do to help protect your family and reduce the risk of infections this season.

You can find out more health advice at www.wyhealthiertogether.nhs.uk



1.1 Check your child is up to date with their vaccinations

Vaccination is the best defence against severe illness, so to protect your child, check their red book or contact your GP to make sure that your child is up to date with all of their vaccines.

It's never too late for children to catch up on their childhood vaccines, even if they have missed them in the past, or you are unsure about your child's vaccination history.

Getting vaccinated will not only protect your child but also protect others by stopping outbreaks in nurseries and schools, and reducing the risk of spread to your family and friends. It may also help you avoid having to take time off work or arrange alternative childcare as a result of your child getting ill.

You can see the full list of vaccines your child should have on the [NHS website vaccination schedule, including the flu vaccine.](#)

1.2 Teach your child how to wash their hands and cover their coughs and sneezes

The good hygiene habits that were used to slow the spread of COVID-19 are important defences against a range of other infections, including respiratory infections and stomach bugs, like norovirus.

By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes, and keeping away from others when feeling unwell, will reduce the risk of picking up, or spreading, infections.



HELP US HELP YOU
STAY WELL THIS WINTER

NHS

Protect others from getting sick

Cover mouth and nose with tissue, sleeve or elbow when coughing or sneezing

Throw tissue into closed bin after use

Clean hands after coughing or sneezing and when caring for the sick

World Health Organization

2.0 Symptoms of common infections

There are several common infections that your child might pick up over the winter period. In most cases, these infections will be a mild illness and can be treated at home. However, in some cases they might get worse and require medical help. Some common infections include:

2.1 Colds

It's normal for a child to have eight or more colds a year. This is because there are hundreds of different cold viruses. As children grow up they gradually build up immunity and get fewer colds.

Most colds get better in five to seven days but can take up to two weeks in small children.

[Find out more about colds, coughs and ear infections in children.](#)

2.2 Sore Throats

Sore throats are often caused by viral illnesses such as colds or flu. Your child's throat may be dry and sore for a day or two before a cold starts.

Most sore throats get better on their own after a few days. If your child has a sore throat for more than 4 days, a high temperature and is generally unwell, see a GP.

[Find out more about sore throats.](#)

2.3 Children's coughs

Children often cough when they have a cold because of mucus trickling down the back of the throat. Although it can be upsetting to hear your child cough, coughing helps clear away phlegm from the chest or mucus from the back of the throat.

If your child is drinking, eating and breathing normally and there's no wheezing, a cough is not usually anything to worry about.

If your child's temperature is very high, or they feel hot and shivery, they may have a chest infection. You should take them to a GP, or you can call 111.

2.4 Flu

Flu can be an unpleasant illness in children causing a fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can last several days or longer.

Some children can get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms,

and may need to go to hospital for treatment. Serious complications of flu include a painful ear infection, acute bronchitis, and pneumonia.

The best way for your child to avoid flu is to ensure your child is vaccinated against flu.

Find out more about flu, how to treat the symptoms, who to contact and the vaccination.

2.5 Scarlet Fever

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness but highly infectious. It is caused by Streptococcus A, which can cause different infections such as scarlet fever, tonsillitis or impetigo. Look out for symptoms in your child, which include a sore throat, headache, and fever, along with a characteristic fine, pinkish or red body rash with a sandpapery feel.

Contact your GP or NHS 111 if you suspect your child has scarlet fever, because early treatment of scarlet fever with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications such as pneumonia. If your child has Scarlet Fever, keep them at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

2.6 Covid-19

It is not recommended that children and young people aged 18 years and under are tested for COVID-19 unless advised to by a health professional. If a child or young person has a positive COVID-19 test result they should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 3 days after the day they took the test, if they can. After 3 days, if they feel well and do not have a high temperature, the risk of passing the infection on to others is much lower. This is because children and young people tend to be infectious to other people for less time than adults. Children and young people who usually go to school, college or childcare and who live with someone who has a positive COVID-19 test result should continue to attend as normal.

2.7 Norovirus

Norovirus, commonly known as the winter vomiting bug, is a stomach bug that causes sickness and diarrhoea. Norovirus is able to spread easily through communities and so outbreaks are common in settings where individuals have close contact such as schools and nurseries.

For most children this is an unpleasant, short-lived illness and they make a full recovery within 2-3 days without needing any medicine.

Symptoms include sudden onset of nausea, projectile vomiting and diarrhoea but can also include a high temperature, abdominal pain and aching limbs.



Diarrhoea and vomiting?

You can usually treat yourself or your child at home

Find out how



Good hand hygiene is important to stop norovirus spreading. To avoid catching norovirus or passing it on to others wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water. This is most important following an episode of illness, after using the toilet, before eating or preparing food as well as cleaning up vomit or diarrhoea.

Alcohol-based hand sanitisers are not effective against norovirus.

Vomiting and diarrhoea causes your body to lose water and salts, which can lead to dehydration, so it is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent this.

Stay at home. Do not send children to school until 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped and do not visit your GP or hospital while symptomatic. If you are concerned about your symptoms, talk to your GP by phone, contact NHS 111 or visit the [NHS norovirus webpage](#).

More information

You can find out more health advice at www.wyhealthiertogether.nhs.uk

3.0 Support your child's school or nursery by keeping them off when needed

Depending on the type of infection, it may spread through respiratory droplets, direct contact between people, or via contact with a contaminated surface. This means that if your child is infectious, there is a risk they could pass it to others in their school or nursery, or amongst other members of your family.

If your child has mild respiratory symptoms, like a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough but are otherwise well, they can continue to attend their school or nursery.

If your child has a tummy bug with vomiting and/or diarrhoea, keep them off for 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

[More information about when to keep your child away from school or nursery.](#)

4.0 Summary

Winter can be a challenging time of year for everyone but following the steps above will help to keep your child and people around them fit and healthy, as well as reducing the pressure on the NHS.

4.1 How long could infections last?

Cough

**Sore throat
or earache**

**Common
cold**

Norovirus
(winter vomiting)

**Sinus
infection**



21 days

7 to 8 days

14 days

2 to 3 days

14 to 21 days

Contact your GP if symptoms are getting worse or if things are not improving in the above time frames.



Antibiotics won't help the symptoms of cold, flu or coronavirus (COVID-19) – please trust your healthcare professional, take antibiotics only as prescribed, never share with others and don't save for later. Taking antibiotics when you don't need them puts you and your loved ones at risk of having an untreatable infection in future.



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