

Childhood Respiratory Illnesses – mild or minor symptoms could be treated at home

During the last year there has been a 'remarkable reduction' in respiratory viral infections other than COVID-19, because of social distancing measures. This has meant an increasing number of young children have never been exposed to mild viruses.

NHS England warned earlier in the year that a possible increase in childhood respiratory illnesses was on its 'radar', and this might cause an issue moving forward. The reason for the expected surge is that we have had two winters where children have had limited exposure to common respiratory illnesses. A prolonged period of low-rate respiratory virus transmission means that the majority children have not experienced mild respiratory illness for some time and babies who may have been born during the first lockdown, have not had chance to build a strong immunity because of social distancing.

Locally our Urgent Emergency Care (UEC) services are already extremely busy and we have started to see a steady increase in patients presenting with childhood respiratory illnesses - most of which are mild or minor symptoms which could be treated at home.

If your child is feeling unwell with a cough, cold or sore throat, book a COVID-19 test at one of our community testing centres as soon as possible to ensure their condition is not COVID-19. If the test is negative, visiting your local community pharmacy is the quickest and most convenient way to access care, advice and medicines that may ease your child's symptoms.

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

Parents are also being encouraged to stock up their medicine cabinets so that they are prepared to treat minor symptoms and illnesses at home. Here is a list of things that can be bought from a pharmacy or supermarket which might help you care for an unwell child at home.

- Children's paracetamol
- Children's ibuprofen (children with asthma may not be able to take Ibuprofen (check with a pharmacist)
- Digital thermometer
- Vapor rub
- Children's cough syrup
- Nasal saline drops
- Honey (*not suitable for under 12 months*)
- Ice-lollies
- Soft tissues

If your child's temperature is very high (38C or more), they feel hot and shivery or have a distinctive barking cough that makes a harsh sound, known as a stridor when they breath in, contact your GP, go to 111.nhs.uk or download the NHS app.

It is normal for a child to have eight or more colds a year, this is because there are hundreds of different cold viruses. Children gradually build up immunity and get fewer colds over time. Most colds get better in five to seven days but can take up to two weeks in small children.

If your child is unable to swallow fluids or saliva or have any difficulty breathing, go to A&E or call 999 immediately as they may need urgent treatment in hospital.