

Education and childcare settings respiratory illness update

As we move towards winter, respiratory illnesses including COVID-19 and flu can become a concern in childcare and education settings. You may also have heard about a new COVID-19 variant, BA.2.86, that was identified in England during August 2023. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is closely monitoring the activity of this variant, in addition to all respiratory illnesses.

As a result of detailed monitoring, UKHSA current advice is that there is no need for any increased concern or changes to existing practices and COVID-19 should be managed like other respiratory infections such as flu.

Please find below a reminder of measures that are recommended in education and childcare settings:

Good hygiene habits

Good hygiene stops infections from spreading, which means less disrupted learning time. Now is a good time to reinforce these practices including:

- Regular and effective handwashing and cleaning
- Use of tissues for coughs and sneezes, and stay away from others when sick
- Ensuring occupied spaces are well-ventilated and allow fresh air in

What to do if a child has symptoms

Children and young people with mild symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough, who are otherwise well, can continue to attend their education setting.

Children and young people who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact with other people, where they can. They can go back to school, college or childcare, and resume normal activities when they no longer have a high temperature and they are well enough to attend.

All children and young people with respiratory symptoms should be encouraged to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing and/or sneezing and to wash their hands after using or disposing of tissues.

Most people can no longer access free testing for COVID-19. It is not recommended that children and young people are tested for COVID-19 unless directed by a health professional.

For children and young people aged 18 and under who test positive for COVID-19, the advice is to try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for three days. This is because children and young people tend to be infectious to other people for less time than adults.

Adults with a positive COVID-19 test result are advised to try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for five days, which is when they are most infectious.

Vaccinations provide the best protection against common illnesses. Unvaccinated children are at higher risk of contracting these illnesses and having more severe symptoms than vaccinated classmates.

Over the last few years, we have seen that fewer children are getting routine vaccinations. The flu nasal vaccination (no needle involved) is an annual vaccination and is available for children aged 2 and 3 via GPs and is being offered in schools to all children up to year 11. Some children in vulnerable groups will also be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination.

Advice to parents

As a new school year begins, parents can help to slow the spread of seasonal illnesses and avoid unnecessary absences. This article covers the role of healthy hygiene habits, vaccination, spotting the symptoms of common illnesses, and how to make informed decisions on whether a sick student is well enough to attend school or college.

Read the post here: <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/08/a-parents-guide-to-keeping-kids-healthy-this-school-year/>