

# How to Recognize and Treat Exacerbations (Flare-ups) and Other Illnesses





# How To Recognize and Treat Exacerbations (Flare-ups)

*First edition*

Developed by Allina Health.

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This publication is for general information only and is not intended to provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual. The information it contains cannot be used to diagnose medical conditions or prescribe treatment. The information provided is designed to support, not replace, the relationship that exists between a patient and his/her existing physician.

For specific information about your health condition, please contact your health care provider.





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# Respiratory Infections

## Important

Call your primary care provider as soon as you start to feel sick. Do not wait more than 1 day to call after respiratory symptoms begin.

Respiratory infections affect your lungs and breathing. They cause changes in your sputum (color, how much you have and how thick it is) and in your breathing.

There are many types of infections that are caused by different germs (virus and bacteria). Common types of respiratory infections are cold, influenza and pneumonia. Getting an infection can make your regular symptoms worse. This is known as an exacerbation, or flare-up.

## What to Pay Attention to

If you get sick, it is important to call your primary care provider. Tell him or her the following to help identify if you have a respiratory infection.

Questions	Answers	For How Long
What changes do I have in my sputum or breathing?		<input type="checkbox"/> ___ hour(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ___ day(s)
What symptoms are new or getting worse?		<input type="checkbox"/> ___ hour(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ___ day(s)
How are my symptoms different that usual?		<input type="checkbox"/> ___ hour(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ___ day(s)
How do I feel?		<input type="checkbox"/> ___ hour(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ___ day(s)
What have I done to treat my symptoms?		<input type="checkbox"/> ___ hour(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ___ day(s)
Is there anything else I want to share with my primary care provider?		<input type="checkbox"/> ___ hour(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ___ day(s)

## How to Treat a Respiratory Infection

- Your primary care provider may prescribe medicine:
  - antibiotic (to treat an infection caused by bacteria)
  - bronchodilator (to open your airways)
  - prednisone (to reduce swelling).
- Take all medicines as directed.
- Drink lots of clear liquids. These will help thin out the mucus that can add to the breathing problems. Have a variety of liquids from which you can choose.
- Take extra rest periods.

Follow the directions in your After Visit Summary.  
Keep all follow-up appointments, even if you are feeling well.

## When to Call Your Primary Care Provider

Call your primary care provider if you:

- cough up thick yellow-green mucus
- have shortness of breath
- have more trouble breathing
- flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- have a poor color (looks gray or blue)
- have more coughing
- have a fever of more than 100.8 F
- have a poor appetite
- feel anxious
- have chest pain
- have a severe headache
- have pain or a stiff neck
- have a yellowing of the skin or eyes
- throw up more than 3 to 5 times a day
- have signs of dehydration:
  - no urine for 8 hours
  - dryness of the tongue and mouth
  - dry sunken-looking eyes
  - weakness
- are not better in 2 to 3 days.



## What Else You Can Do if You are Sick

If you have an upper respiratory illness, it is important to take care of yourself so you do not get sicker.

One of the most important things you can do is to be active, even if you do not feel well.

Spending too much time in bed is not good for your muscles and well-being. For every day you stay in bed, you need 3 days to regain your strength.

It is important for you to be up and moving as much as possible. This will help to:

- reduce falls
- improve your appetite
- keep your muscles from becoming weak
- keep you from getting constipated (unable to have a bowel movement)
- reduce the risk of bed sores (pressure injuries).

To speed your recovery, try to maintain your usual sleep-wake pattern. Being tired and being in pain can make it difficult to move around. To help you sleep at night:

- turn off bright lights
- turn off the TV
- read
- listen to quiet music
- have warm drinks
- have a bedtime snack
- try meditation
- try your relaxation techniques and breathing exercises.

# How to Tell the Difference Between COVID-19, Influenza, Cold

## COVID-19, influenza, cold

Respiratory illnesses like SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (COVID-19), influenza (flu) and the common cold, are spread by:

- droplets released into the air by coughing or sneezing
- having unclean hands and touching your face, mouth, eyes or nose.

## What to do if you think you have COVID-19

COVID-19 symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. They can be similar to other illnesses such as influenza or a cold. (See below.)

Many people with COVID-19 have mild or few symptoms, and some may have no symptoms at all. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should get tested.

Call or message your health care provider if you think you have COVID-19.

Symptom	COVID-19	Influenza	Cold
cough	often	often	sometimes
fever	often	often	rarely
body aches	sometimes	often	rarely
shortness of breath	sometimes	sometimes	rarely
headache	sometimes	often	sometimes
fatigue	sometimes	often	sometimes
sore throat	sometimes	sometimes	sometimes
loss of taste or smell	sometimes	rarely	rarely
diarrhea	sometimes	rarely	never
chest pain or pressure	rarely	rarely	never
runny nose	rarely	sometimes	often
sneezing	rarely	sometimes	often

Source: Minnesota Department of Health; [health.mn.gov](http://health.mn.gov).

# How To Help Protect Yourself

You can help avoid getting a respiratory infection by:

- getting vaccinations (See pages 9-10.)
- washing your hands often (See pages 11-12.)
- covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze
- staying away from large crowds
- wearing a mask if you are in public or outside
- avoiding close contact with anyone who is sick
- not touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- drinking plenty of liquids
- eating well
- managing your stress
- getting enough sleep and rest
- going to your primary care provider if you are not feeling well.

## Vaccinations (Shots)

You can help prevent getting some illnesses by getting shots. Vaccines are made from live or killed germs (virus or bacteria) that cause your body's immune system to fight the germs. This helps your body build immunity so you are protected from getting the illness.

Staying current on your immunizations can help keep you from getting sick. The chart on the next page shows which immunizations you should consider. Talk with your primary care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Vaccination		Age Recommendation
influenza	Influenza	Adult (every year)
tetanus + diphtheria	Td (replace one routine Td booster with Tdap regardless of when the last Td was given.)	Adult (every 10 years)
herpes zoster	RZV (2 dose series)	Age 50 years and older
pneumococcal 13-valent conjugate vaccine	PCV13	Age 65 years and older
pneumococcal	PPSV23	Age 66 years and older

Vaccination for Adults at High Risk		
Hepatitis B	DTaP-HepB-IPV	Talk with your primary care provider to see if you need these or any other vaccines.
Hepatitis A	HepA	
meningococcal conjugate vaccine	MCV4	

Your Vaccinations		
Date	Vaccination	Brand Name
4/25/2019	PPSV23 and HZV	Pneumovax® and Zostavax®

# Wash Your Hands

## Help Stop the Spread of Germs

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Put the used tissue in the waste basket.
- If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.



**It only takes 15 seconds of using either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub to kill the germs that cause infections.**

Hand hygiene is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infections. Wash your hands:

- before preparing or eating food
- before touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- before and after changing wound dressings or bandages
- after using the bathroom
- after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.

There are two different ways to clean your hands.

## Soap and water

Use soap and water:

- when your hands look dirty
- after you use the bathroom
- before you prepare and eat food.

You should use soap and water to clean your hands if you have diarrhea or you have been diagnosed with *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff).

## To wash your hands:

- Wet your hands with warm water and apply one pump of liquid soap.
- Rub your hands together until the soap forms a lather and then rub all over the top of your hands, in between your fingers and the area around and under the fingernails.
- Continue rubbing your hands for 15 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel if possible. Then use your paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the door, if needed.

## Alcohol-based hand rub

Use an alcohol-based hand rub:

- when your hands do not look dirty
- if soap and water are not available.

### **To clean your hands:**

- Follow directions on the bottle for how much of the product to use.
- Rub your hands together and then rub product all over the top of your hands, in between your fingers and the area around and under the fingernails.
- Continue rubbing until your hands are dry. If enough rub was used to kill germs, it should take at least 15 seconds of rubbing before your hands feel dry. You should not rinse your hands with water or dry them with a towel.

## **Where to Go for Care**

The following are general guidelines for certain situations. Ask your primary care provider for specific directions for your care.

### **Clinic or Urgent Care**

If a clinic does not have an appointment available or the problem is more serious, go to urgent care. Urgent care treats people of all ages. Go to an Allina Health clinic or urgent care for:

#### ■ **infections such as:**

- fever
- sore throat or ear pain
- cold or flu symptoms
- respiratory infections
- urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- skin infections

#### ■ **illnesses such as:**

- rashes or allergic reactions
- migraines and headaches
- back pain
- minor chest pain (without history of a heart problem)
- abdominal pain, throwing up (vomiting) or diarrhea (loose, watery stools).

It is important to go to urgent care for all other non-life-threatening injuries, infections and illnesses.

# Hospital Emergency Department

**Have someone drive you to the nearest hospital Emergency Department or call 911 right away if you have any signs or symptoms of a life-threatening condition such as:**

- severe chest pain
- severe breathing problems
- severe allergic reactions
- sudden weakness or vision loss
- trouble talking
- loss of consciousness
- choking.








# Chronic Lung Disease Action Plan

## What To Do Every Day:

- Take your medicines as directed.
- Stay active and exercise as much as you can.
- Do not smoke.
- Make sure no one smokes in your house or around you.
- Drink water. Follow your doctor's instructions for how much water to drink.

## Call Your Clinic if You Have Any of the Following:

- more coughing, mucus or phlegm than usual 
- more short of breath or wheezing than usual 
- more tired than usual or unable to do your usual activities 

- fever of 100.8 F or higher
- using your inhalers or nebulizers more than usual
- lower oxygen saturation than usual
- people around you say your symptoms have changed

### Whom to Call and What to Say

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tell the person who answers the phone, "I have chronic lung disease and my symptoms have changed. I need to make an appointment with a doctor today."

## Call 911 or Go to the Hospital if You:

- can't catch your breath at rest
- have no relief from a rescue inhaler
- have bluish lips or fingernails
- have grayish skin
- have confusion
- can't wake up easily











## To Do List



- Know when to call your primary care provider.
- Write down your symptoms, how they change, how long you have them, and what you do to treat them.
- Get vaccinations if they are not current.
- Follow good hand hygiene.
- Create an action plan with your primary care provider.
- Keep all follow-up appointments.













[allinahealth.org](http://allinahealth.org)