

# *Infectious Disease Guide*

**EARLY HEAD START**

# Influenza (Flu)

## What is the Common Cold?

It's a viral infection that primarily affects the upper respiratory tract, including the nose and throat. The common cold is caused by a variety of viruses, with rhinoviruses being the most prevalent culprits. Symptoms typically include a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, coughing, sore throat, and sometimes a mild fever.

## When is Flu Season?

Flu season typically runs from **October to May**, with peak activity between **December and February**. It's important to be prepared, especially during these months!

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (feeling very tired)
- Some people may experience **vomiting and diarrhea**, though this is more common in children.

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Get your **flu vaccine**—it's the best way to prevent the flu.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you experience severe symptoms or are at higher risk for complications, contact your healthcare provider promptly.

# Common Cold

## What is the Common Cold?

The common cold is a viral infection that affects your nose and throat, causing symptoms like a runny nose, sneezing, coughing, and a sore throat. It's usually harmless and resolves within a week or two.

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Sneezing & Runny Nose
- Cough & Congestion
- Sore Throat
- Mild Fatigue
- Occasional Fever

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water
- Avoid close contact with sick individuals
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces
- Maintain a healthy diet and get plenty of rest

## Treatment Options:

- Stay hydrated with plenty of fluids
- Rest to help your body recover
- Use over-the-counter medications for symptom relief
- Humidify your environment to ease congestion

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- Symptoms last more than 10 days
- High fever persists
- Symptoms worsen or don't improve

# Covid-19

## **When is COVID-19 Most Active?**

COVID-19 tends to surge during **fall and winter months**, especially from **October to March**, when people spend more time indoors and respiratory illnesses spread more easily.

## **Symptoms to Watch For:**

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

## **How to Protect Yourself:**

- Get vaccinated and stay up to date on booster shots.
- Wear a mask in crowded indoor spaces.
- Maintain social distance when possible.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Use hand sanitizer if soap isn't available.
- Stay home if you feel sick and get tested.

## **When to Seek Medical Advice:**

- If you experience any of the following symptoms, contact a healthcare provider immediately or seek emergency medical care:
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Persistent chest pain or pressure
  - New confusion or inability to stay awake
  - Bluish lips or face
  - Severe fatigue or weakness

## **Important Reminder:**

Some individuals may experience mild symptoms or none at all but can still spread COVID-19 to others.

# Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

## When is RSV Most Active?

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is most active during the **fall, winter, and early spring** months. It tends to coincide with the typical cold and flu season, affecting many people during these colder periods. However, the exact timing and duration of RSV season can vary depending on the region and climate.

## What is RSV?

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) is a common virus that affects the lungs and breathing passages. While it can infect individuals of all ages, it is particularly serious for infants, young children, and older adults.

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Runny nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing

In infants under 6 months, symptoms may also include irritability, decreased activity, and breathing difficulties.

## How is RSV Spread?

RSV is highly contagious and spreads through droplets from a cough or sneeze. It can also be transmitted by touching surfaces or objects that have the virus on them, followed by touching the face.

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Avoid close contact with sick individuals.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces regularly.
- Avoid sharing cups or utensils with others.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

If you or your child experience difficulty breathing, have a high fever, or show signs of dehydration (such as dry mouth, lack of tears, or decreased urination), contact a healthcare professional immediately.

# Seasonal Asthma or Allergies

## When Do Seasonal Allergies & Asthma Flare-Ups Occur?

Seasonal allergies and asthma tend to peak during certain months:

- Spring (March to May): Pollens from trees and flowers.
- Late Summer to Fall (August to October): Ragweed pollen is common.
- Winter (November to February): Indoor allergens like dust mites, pet dander, and mold increase due to more time spent indoors.

## Symptoms to Watch For (Allergies):

- Sneezing
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Itchy throat or ears
- Coughing

## Symptoms to Watch For (Asthma):

- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness or pain
- Wheezing (a whistling sound when breathing)
- Coughing, especially at night or early morning

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Avoid triggers like pollen, mold, dust, or pet dander.
- Use air purifiers or keep windows closed during peak pollen seasons.
- Follow your asthma action plan and take prescribed medications.
- Wear a mask outdoors during high pollen seasons.
- Use over-the-counter allergy medications as needed.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you experience difficulty breathing or worsening asthma symptoms.
- If allergy symptoms are severe or do not improve with over-the-counter medications.

# Strep Throat

## When is Strep Throat Most Common?

Strep throat tends to spread more during the late fall, winter, and early spring months (**October to April**). It's highly contagious and often spreads in settings like schools and daycare centers, where people are in close contact.

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Severe sore throat that comes on suddenly
- Painful swallowing
- Red and swollen tonsils, sometimes with white patches or streaks of pus
- Fever
- Headache
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Nausea or vomiting, especially in children
- Rash (in some cases, leading to scarlet fever)

## How Does Strep Throat Spread?

- Through respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing.
- By touching surfaces contaminated with the bacteria and then touching your face.

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Avoid close contact with sick individuals.
- Stay home if you or your child are diagnosed with strep throat until at least 24 hours after starting antibiotics.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you or your child have a sore throat with a fever, swollen lymph nodes, or white patches on the tonsils.
- Quick treatment with antibiotics can prevent complications and reduce the contagious period.

## Important:

- Not all sore throats are strep throat! Strep throat is caused by the bacteria Group A Streptococcus, so it requires diagnosis and treatment from a healthcare provider.

# Sinusitis (Sinus Infections)

## When is Sinusitis Most Common?

Sinusitis, or a sinus infection, can happen year-round but is more common during cold and flu season, typically in the fall and winter months (**November to March**). It often follows colds or allergies, especially when the weather is colder and people spend more time indoors.

## What is Sinusitis?

Sinusitis is an inflammation of the sinuses, often caused by a viral infection, like a cold, or by bacteria or allergies. It blocks mucus from draining properly, leading to pain and pressure.

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Facial pain or pressure, especially around the forehead, eyes, and cheeks
- Congestion or a blocked nose
- Thick, discolored mucus (yellow or green)
- Post-nasal drip (mucus dripping down the throat)
- Headache (especially around the sinuses)
- Cough (worse at night due to post-nasal drip)
- Fever (in some cases)
- Loss of smell

## Types of Sinusitis:

- Acute Sinusitis: Symptoms last up to 4 weeks, usually caused by a cold or viral infection.
- Chronic Sinusitis: Symptoms last more than 12 weeks and may be due to allergies or other underlying conditions.

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Stay hydrated to help thin mucus.
- Use a humidifier or saline nasal spray to moisten your nasal passages.
- Over-the-counter decongestants or pain relievers may help reduce symptoms.
- Rest and use a warm compress on your face to relieve sinus pressure.
- Wash your hands regularly to prevent cold and flu infections.
- Manage allergies to reduce the risk of sinusitis caused by allergic reactions.
- Avoid smoke and other irritants that can inflame your sinuses.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If your symptoms last more than 10 days or worsen after initially improving.
- If you experience high fever, severe facial pain, or swelling around the eyes.
- If you have recurrent sinus infections that affect your quality of life.



# Pneumonia

## When is Pneumonia Most Common?

Pneumonia can occur year-round, but it is most common in the fall and **winter months (October to March)**, particularly during cold and flu season. The risk is higher when respiratory infections like the flu are widespread, especially in older adults, young children, and people with weakened immune systems.

## What is Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection that inflames the air sacs in one or both lungs, which can fill with fluid or pus. It can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi, and often develops after a cold, flu, or other respiratory infections.

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Cough (with phlegm or mucus)
- Fever and chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chest pain (when breathing or coughing)
- Fatigue or feeling very weak
- Sweating
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Confusion (especially in older adults)

## Types of Pneumonia:

- Bacterial pneumonia: Often causes more severe symptoms and needs antibiotic treatment.
- Viral pneumonia: Often milder but can still cause serious complications.
- Aspiration pneumonia: Occurs when food, drink, or saliva gets into the lungs, often in people who have trouble swallowing.

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Get vaccinated for pneumonia and flu to reduce the risk of respiratory infections.
- Wash your hands frequently to prevent the spread of germs.
- Don't smoke—smoking damages your lungs and increases the risk of infection.
- Stay away from sick individuals and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you have trouble breathing, persistent chest pain, or confusion.
- If symptoms worsen or do not improve with treatment.
- If you have a high fever (over 102°F) or are coughing up bloody mucus.

# Norovirus (Stomach Flu)

## When is Norovirus Most Common?

Norovirus outbreaks can occur year-round but are most common during the fall and winter months (**November to April**). This highly contagious virus often spreads in crowded environments, such as schools, nursing homes, and cruise ships.

## What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a highly contagious virus that causes gastroenteritis, leading to inflammation of the stomach and intestines. It can spread quickly, especially in settings where people are in close quarters.

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (often watery)
- Stomach cramps
- Fatigue
- Low-grade fever (in some cases)
- Muscle aches

## Symptoms typically begin:

- 12 to 48 hours after exposure to the virus and usually last 1 to 3 days.

## How Does Norovirus Spread?

- Through contaminated food or water.
- By touching surfaces contaminated with the virus, then touching your mouth or face.
- Close contact with an infected person, such as sharing utensils or caring for someone who is sick.

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially after using the restroom and before preparing or eating food.
- Disinfect surfaces and shared items regularly, especially in communal areas.
- Avoid preparing food for others if you are sick or have been recently ill.
- Stay home if you are experiencing symptoms to prevent spreading the virus to others.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you experience severe dehydration (symptoms include dry mouth, dizziness, and reduced urine output).
- If symptoms are severe or last more than 3 days.
- If you are unable to keep fluids down due to vomiting.

# Foodborne Illness

## When are Foodborne Illnesses Most Common?

Foodborne illnesses can occur year-round but tend to spike during warmer months (May to September) when food is often prepared and consumed outdoors. They can also increase during holidays and large gatherings when food is prepared in large quantities.

## What is Foodborne Illness?

Foodborne illness, also known as **food poisoning**, occurs when you consume contaminated food or beverages. Contaminants can include bacteria, viruses, parasites, and chemicals.

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (often watery)
- Stomach cramps
- Fatigue
- Fever (in some cases)

## Symptoms typically appear:

- 6 hours to several days after consuming contaminated food, depending on the type of pathogen involved.

## Common Pathogens that Cause Foodborne Illness:

- **Bacteria:** Salmonella, E. coli, Listeria, Campylobacter, and Clostridium perfringens.
- **Viruses:** Norovirus and Hepatitis A.
- **Parasites:** Giardia and Cryptosporidium.

## How to Protect Yourself:

- **Wash hands** thoroughly with soap and water before handling food and after using the restroom.
- **Cook food** to the appropriate temperatures to kill harmful bacteria.
- Keep raw and cooked foods separate to avoid cross-contamination.
- **Store food properly**—refrigerate leftovers within two hours.
- **Thaw food** safely in the refrigerator, cold water, or the microwave, not at room temperature.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you experience severe dehydration (symptoms include dry mouth, dizziness, and reduced urine output).
- If symptoms are severe or last more than **3 days**.
- If you have a **high fever** (over 102°F) or blood in your stools.

# Hand, Foot, And Mouth Disease

## When is HFMD Most Common?

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD) can occur year-round but is most common during the late spring, summer, and early fall months (**May to September**). Outbreaks often happen in daycare centers and schools where children are in close contact.

## What is Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease?

HFMD is a contagious viral infection primarily caused by **Coxsackievirus**. It typically affects children under 5 years old but can occasionally affect older children and adults.

## Symptoms to Watch For:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Mouth sores (painful red spots that can become ulcers)
- Rash: Red spots or blisters on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, sometimes spreading to the buttocks and legs
- Loss of appetite
- Irritability in infants and toddlers

## Symptoms typically appear:

- 3 to 7 days after exposure to the virus.

## How Does HFMD Spread?

- Through close personal contact with an infected person.
- Contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.
- Through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

## Who is Most at Risk?

- Children under 5 years old are most commonly affected.
- Unvaccinated individuals and those with weakened immune systems can also be at higher risk.

## How to Protect Yourself:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the restroom and before eating.
- Disinfect commonly used surfaces and objects (toys, doorknobs).
- Avoid close contact with infected individuals, especially in daycare or school settings.

## When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If symptoms worsen or if your child has a high fever that does not respond to treatment.
- If your child is unable to drink fluids due to mouth sores or has signs of dehydration (such as dry mouth, no tears, or decreased urination).