



Guidance on managing outbreaks of respiratory infections in schools and nurseries

During winter there may be an increase in viral respiratory infections such as the [common cold](#), [flu](#), and [COVID-19](#). These are very infectious and can cause outbreaks – so good infection prevention and control (IPC) practices are important.

Young children, those with chronic conditions and pregnant women are particularly at risk of developing complications – so it is important that they are immunised from any vaccine-preventable diseases, such as flu and COVID-19.

- **Respiratory outbreak definition:** a greater than expected rate of infection compared with the usual background rate for the place and time where the outbreak has occurred
- **Response:** follow your local arrangements for reporting outbreaks

How respiratory infections are spread

- **Person to person:** spread through small droplets, aerosol, and direct contact
- **Contaminated surfaces:** from coughs and sneezes and unwashed hands
- **Close contact:** with infected individuals, especially in poorly ventilated spaces

How to limit spread of respiratory infections

- **Exclusion:** anyone unwell and with a high temperature should stay at home until temperature is normal and they are well enough to return
- **Good hand and respiratory hygiene:** [e-Bug](#) has a range of educational resources for ages 3 to 16 to learn about microbes, infection prevention and control, antibiotics, and vaccination
- **Tissues and handwash:** make sure you have adequate supplies along with displaying 'Catch it. Bin it. Kill it.' Posters
- **Increase cleaning of touch points:** cleaning guidance is available online in the information on [Health protection in children and young people settings, including education](#)
- **Ventilation:** Keep occupied spaces well ventilated. Identify any poorly ventilated spaces as part of your risk assessment and take steps to improve fresh air flow. See online guidance [Ventilation to reduce the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19](#)

Reporting an outbreak of respiratory infection to UKHSA

Call the **UKHSA West Midlands Health Protection Team** on **0344 225 3560, Option 2** or email westmidlands.arc@uhkhsa.gov.uk

What UKHSA will ask for:

- **Setting:** name and address, including postcode
- **Contact person:** name and phone number and email
- **Total numbers affected:** children, young people and staff (including non-teaching staff)
- **Total numbers attending** children, young people, and staff
- **Areas affected:** number of classes, rooms year groups (including nursery if applicable)
- **Symptoms:** list of all symptoms experienced
- **Onset:** date when symptoms started, including brief overview of sequence of numbers of new cases since first (index) case
- **Severity:** any indications of severe disease, such as overnight admissions to hospital
- **Events or trips:** details of any events or trips in the week prior to the start of the outbreak
- **Testing:** if any tests or clinical assessments have taken place (if known)
- **Clinically vulnerable:** if there are any individuals within the affected group at higher risk from severe disease (eg chronic conditions, suppressed immunity, pregnant staff)
- **Vaccination status:** if staff / pupils in risk groups are fully vaccinated for [flu](#) and [COVID-19](#)

National guidance

National guidance [Health protection in children and young people settings, including education](#) is available online at GOV.UK. The following are links to individual chapters, for ease of reading:

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| 1 | Infections in childcare settings | Infections |
| 2 | Preventing and controlling infections (includes cleaning guidance) | Prevention and control |
| 3 | Guidance for handwashing | How to wash your hands – NHS Hand hygiene poster |
| 4 | e-Bug resources | e-bug |
| 5 | Managing outbreaks and incidents | Advice for all outbreaks |
| 6 | Specific educational settings and populations – additional considerations | Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early years or pre-school• Special Educational Needs (SEN)• Residential educational settings |
| 7 | Children and young people settings – tools and resources | Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exclusion table• Posters• Diarrhoea and vomiting outbreak – action checklist |
| Vaccination information: COVID-19 vaccine and Child Influenza Programme | | |