

Influenza-like Illnesses and RSV

Advice for early childhood learning services

During winter, there is usually an increase in infectious respiratory illnesses caused by a range of viruses and bacteria that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. These include:

- Colds
- Influenza-like Illnesses (ILI) – includes RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus), parainfluenza viruses and rhinoviruses
- Influenza

This guide is for Influenza-like Illnesses (ILI) which can be serious in infants and children under 5 years. Our website has guidelines on influenza, including managing outbreaks in institutions.

The three key action points to preventing and managing influenza-like illnesses:

- Take everyday preventive measures to prevent spread – like asking sick children to stay at home until they are symptom-free, and promoting hand, cough and sneeze hygiene.
- Have a plan so you know what to do if someone gets sick or you have a number of children or staff sick with ILI or RSV
- Vaccinate for other respiratory illnesses. There is no vaccine for RSV. Infants should receive a pneumococcal vaccine at 6 weeks, 5 months and 12 months. If children or staff are eligible then they should get a free flu vaccine each year.

How serious is ILI?

- These illnesses range in severity and though often mild, can lead to hospitalisation, particularly for young children and vulnerable adults.
- ILI spreads easily from person to person, with early learning services (ELS) and schools are at higher risk of spread and outbreaks than the rest of the community.

What are the symptoms of ILI?

ILI can cause a range of symptoms, including:

- Cough
- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Loss of appetite or difficulty feeding
- Wheezing and difficulty breathing
- Fatigue/tiredness
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea can also occur (especially in children)

In very young infants, irritability or decreased activity might be the only signs a child is becoming more unwell and needs to see a doctor.

The key points for ELS are:

- Disseminate information to staff and parents of children that it's not OK to attend your service with an influenza-like illness. An [information sheet](#) for parents is on ARPHS' website.
- If children are dropped off with symptoms of ILI, isolate them from others, until a caregiver can pick them up. Unwell staff should go home immediately.
- If staff or children develop concerning symptoms, such as rapid breathing, difficulty breathing, chest pain, severe vomiting, or if a child is not responding or is difficult to wake up, they should seek medical attention immediately – including calling 111 for an ambulance if it is an emergency.
- Children and staff with symptoms of ILI should stay away until they are free of symptoms for 24 hours or they have a doctor's clearance letter.
- Staff with these symptoms should be tested for COVID-19, but symptomatic children under the age of 12 years do not need to be tested unless:
 - they have been in contact with a case,
 - left managed isolation in the last 14 days,
 - have returned from a place where there is COVID-19,
 - their parents request this or their doctor requires it,
 - Auckland is at Alert Level 2 or above or,
 - a Medical Officer of Health requires this as part of targeted testing in a community.
- Contact ARPHS on if there are increasing numbers of cases. ARPHS on 09 623 4600 can assist with advice on infection control measures and messages for your whānau and staff.

Cleaning advice for your ELS is available [here](#).

The risk of infection can be reduced by increasing cleaning of areas with frequent hand contact. Clean all areas and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact (like doorknobs, taps, handrails, toys) routinely and also immediately when visibly soiled. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas. Disinfection of environmental surfaces beyond routine cleaning is not required.

Respiratory viruses can spread in inadequately ventilated internal spaces. Ensure windows can be opened and air-conditioning systems operate properly. It is advisable that air handling systems do not re-circulate air and are vented to the outside wherever possible.

Where can I seek advice or find out more about RSV?

Free phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 or visit:

- The Ministry of Health website – www.health.govt.nz
- The Auckland Regional Public Health Service website – www.arphs.health.nz

- The Immunisation Advisory Centre website – www.immune.org.nz

The following links have some good tips for looking after children with winter illnesses:

- <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/r/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-infection/>
- <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-infection>
- <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/flu-influenza>
- <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/cough-children>

Kidshealth also has information to help you identify if children are struggling to breathe:

- [Signs children are struggling to breathe](#)
- [Information about bronchiolitis](#)