



TO: All Principals, for sharing with parents, guardians and staff

FROM: Dr Abigail Collins, HSE National Clinical Lead, Child Health Public Health
Dr Éamonn O'Moore, HSE Director of National Health Protection

RE: Winter health advice from the HSE

DATE: November 2024

Winter health advice from the HSE

As winter is here, most children will end up picking up common viral infectious illnesses such as colds. You can find tips on dealing with these situations below and on how to reduce the risk of infection.

1. Vaccination

Making sure your child is up to date on all recommended vaccinations helps to:

- stop your child getting the infection they are vaccinated against, and
- make them less likely to be unwell if they do get an infection.

Kid's nasal flu vaccine

Children are twice as likely as adults to catch the flu. That's why all children aged 2 to 17 can get their free [nasal spray flu vaccine](#). It is a safe and effective way to protect them and the rest of your family too. Go to [hse.ie/flu](https://www.hse.ie/flu) for information on how to get the children's flu vaccine.

Children who are immunocompromised are also able to get a COVID-19 autumn booster.

Routine childhood vaccinations

Routine childhood vaccinations protect against many significant viral and bacterial infections. Contact your GP if your child missed out on any of the routine childhood vaccines which take place in 5 visits from age 2 months to 13 months. Find out more about childhood vaccinations [here](#).

Measles

Two doses of the [measles, mumps and rubella \(MMR\) vaccine](#) are needed for the best protection – the first is usually given at 12 months of age and the second when your child is at junior infants stage. Catch-up vaccines are available from participating GPs if your child is older than junior infants and has not received two doses of MMR vaccine.

2. Remind kids of the basics

- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Keep hands clean

Remind your child how to wash their hands (see [video](#)) and cover coughs and sneezes (see [picture](#)). These simple practices may have been forgotten but they make a huge difference in helping to stop the spread of infection. This helps protect more vulnerable people at home, including newborn babies, those who are pregnant or immunocompromised.

Pack some tissues in your child's school bag and make sure they know to throw used ones in the bin.

There are posters available for schools on [washing hands](#) and [covering coughs and sneezes](#).

3. If your child is unwell, keep them home

Many children might have a runny nose or a slight cough as the seasons change. However, if a child is **feeling unwell** they should be at home. For example, if your child:

- has a fever (a temperature of 38 degrees higher)
- is low in energy
- has diarrhoea or vomiting
- cough and sore throat

They should stay at home until they are feeling well again and their symptoms have substantially finished. Children unwell with symptoms of one infection are more likely to get infected with another infection too, which might make them more unwell. Staying home when unwell will help prevent the spread of viruses to other children, families and staff.

Here is a useful graphic which tells you how long children should stay home across a number of different illnesses – '[HPSC: When your child should return to school](#)'.

Prepare in advance for how you would manage if your child has to stay at home. Check to see if you have essentials – children's paracetamol, ibuprofen, thermometer etc.

Most common illnesses are caused by viral infections and do not require an antibiotic. You can find more information about everyday illnesses like colds, coughs, flu, earaches and sore throats on [mychild.ie](#).

4. Know your local care options

It can be hard to know when you should go to your GP or go straight to the hospital emergency department. Advice on when to contact your GP or go to a hospital emergency department is available [here](#).

Find your local urgent and emergency care options by searching the [HSE service finder](#). Note down your local GP out-of-hours phone number, emergency department and injury unit somewhere handy so you know where to go when the time comes.

For more information and advice, visit HSE's [mychild.ie](#).