



Dear patients,

As the weather gets colder and people spend more time indoors, we are seeing a spike in respiratory viruses – especially in children. At our offices, we are seeing very high rates of mild upper respiratory infections (“colds”), in addition to COVID-19 and influenza. Typically, influenza season starts in mid to late December. We began seeing cases of influenza much earlier this year, in mid to late October. And we are already having influenza outbreaks locally in children less than 4 years old.

Making this season even more difficult is that many over-the-counter drugs commonly used for symptom relief for children, such as acetaminophen (i.e., Tylenol) and ibuprofen (i.e., Advil), have been on backorder since May and have been in very short supply since August. Increasingly, there are now also backorders on commonly prescribed antibiotics for common childhood infections, and as doctors we are having to use second or third line antibiotics. Hospitals and ERs are at or beyond capacity already, with the worst of cold and flu season to come.

**In addition to staying home when you are ill and masking when in public**, below are some steps you can take to keep you and those in your household healthy, tips on home treatment, and when to seek care.

Seeking Treatment:

While many people with the flu, COVID-19 or other viral infections will recover on their own, others (e.g., infants/children, seniors, and those with underlying medical conditions) are more prone to complications. [This information sheet](#) can help you decide when to call our office for support.

For parents with sick children, [this is a detailed and thorough resource](#) describing treatments you can do at home and when to seek care.

COVID-19 treatment:

If you get COVID-19 and are at higher risk for severe illness, you may be eligible for treatment with the antiviral Paxlovid – learn more [here](#).

For infants/children:

- See “When to come to the Emergency Department” on [this resource page](#) to help determine if your child needs emergency care.
- Children’s fever and pain medication have been in short supply. Some pharmacies will maintain a supply behind the counter, or may be able to provide alternate options without a prescription (i.e., chewable tablets, suppositories). See [this tip sheet](#) created by pharmacists and children’s hospitals. If you require children’s fever and pain medication, please first talk to your pharmacist.

Flu Vaccination:

Flu shots are widely available at local pharmacies, and this is your first stop for a flu shot. Given that flu is already circulating widely, do not wait! We have limited supply of vaccine at our offices, so you may also be able to get your flu shot if you have a regular appointment scheduled with us in the coming weeks, depending on supply.



Covid Vaccination:

Keep up to date with your vaccination schedule – particularly if you are at risk of severe complications from infection. [This resource clarifies](#) when it's time to get a COVID-19 booster. Booster doses are available for those 5 years+ who have completed their primary COVID-19 vaccine series. Book your boosters through the provincial portal or by calling 1-833-943-3900; check here for a [list of places to get vaccinated](#).

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines can be given at the same time for those over 5 years of age, where available.

For questions about COVID vaccination in children/pregnancy: [The Sick Kids vaccine consult](#) line is available to parents, children, youth, and those who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning to conceive.

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A reminder that masking is required in our clinic to reduce the risk of transmission and protect our most vulnerable patients. Please bring your mask to any in-person appointment.

We have been working hard to try to catch up on care deferred during the peak of the pandemic, but in order to accommodate this immediate surge in respiratory illnesses in our community, Ontario Health has asked us to shift our focus. This may result in some routine care being deferred to a later date. We apologize for any inconvenience that this may cause.

As always, thank you for entrusting your care to us. We are here for you, in person or virtually, as needed.

Sincerely,

Your healthcare providers at STAR Family Health Team