How to Protect Yourself and Others from Respiratory Viruses

This fact sheet outlines prevention measures you can use to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses such as COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Vaccination is one of the strongest layers of prevention for COVID-19 and influenza. Combine it with other layers of prevention to lower your risk.

Ways respiratory viruses are spread

- Respiratory viruses spread most commonly during close contact through an infected person's respiratory particles which are generated when a person breathes, coughs, sneezes or talks.

- Smaller respiratory particles, known as aerosols, can remain suspended in the air and transmit some viruses over long distances. The risk is higher in crowded indoor spaces with poor ventilation.

- Respiratory particles can also land on surfaces (e.g., furniture, surfaces). They can then contaminate your hands and transfer viruses to your eyes, nose and mouth.

Layers of protection against respiratory viruses

Use multiple layers of prevention to provide the best protection.
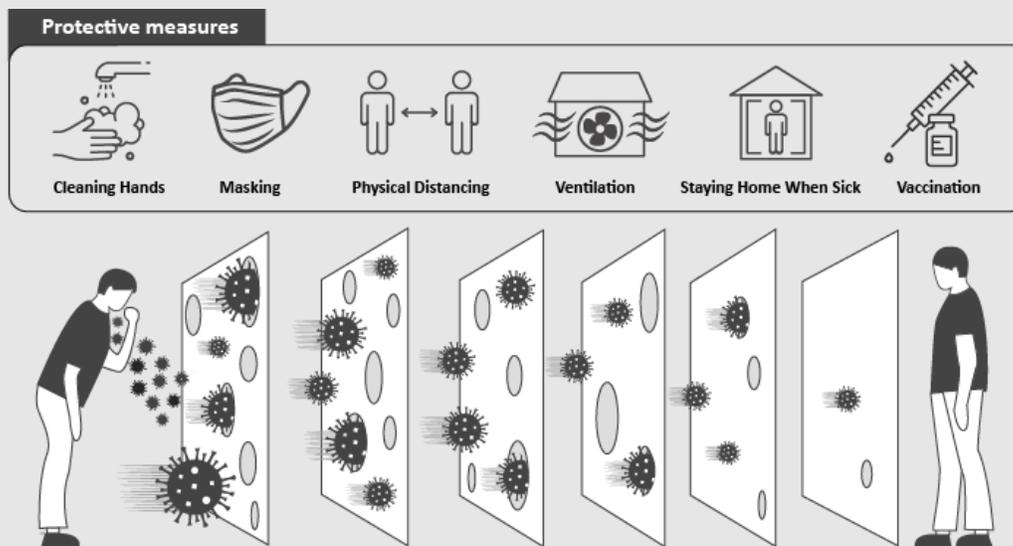
Adapted from: Rockefeller Foundation. Layers of protection against covid-19 - the "Swiss cheese" model [video recording on the Internet]. New York: Rockefeller Foundation; 2021 [cited 2022 Mar 11]. 1:15 min. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ou88Iei-52k

Get vaccinated

- Being vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza helps to protect you from severe disease and hospitalization.

- Remember to get your seasonal influenza vaccine every year and ensure you are up-to-date with all COVID-19 boosters for which you are eligible.

Stay home when sick

- Stay home when you are sick. For example, if you have a fever, new or increased cough, or are experiencing vomiting and or diarrhea.

- If you have to go out:

  - Practice physical distancing and avoid crowded spaces

  - Consider wearing a well-fitting mask in public.

- See Public Health Ontario's How to Self-Isolate fact sheet.

Spend time outdoors or in well-ventilated indoor spaces

- Ensure your ventilation system is in good working order. If you don't have a ventilation system, open windows to increase fresh air flow if possible.

Practice respiratory etiquette and keep things clean

- Wash your hands frequently.

- Cover your coughs and sneezes.

- Wear a mask when ill with a respiratory infection.

- Clean high-touch surfaces regularly.

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