

Is It the Flu, COVID, RSV, or a Cold?

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So, you're starting 2024 with some coughing, sneezing, and maybe even a fever. The first thing you should know is that you're not alone. Even though the holiday season is ending, respiratory season is in full swing. We're seeing a lot of COVID, flu, RSV in local hospitals right now. In fact, one in five ER visits are due to respiratory illnesses.

Complicating matters is that these viruses all cause really similar symptoms, like fever, cough, and stuffy nose.

I took an at-home COVID test, but it was negative. Now what?

It's always good to rule out COVID with an at-home test. One thing to keep in mind is that the FDA recommends using more than one at-home test to reduce the chance of getting a false negative result. Test again 48 hours after the first negative test, for a total of at least two tests.

If you continue to test negative for COVID and you're still feeling sick, you might be wondering what else you should do. Some of the same recommendations we've been talking about for COVID, apply to all respiratory illnesses.

- **Stay home and keep the germs to yourself, if possible.** This is especially important when it comes to being around people who are more likely to get very sick from respiratory illnesses. Consider wearing a high-quality mask if you do need to spend time in close contact with others.

- **Get plenty of rest.** Sometimes the best thing you can do to heal your body is rest. Staying hydrated is important too.

- **Call your primary care provider if your symptoms are getting worse.** Your doctor will be better able to assess what kind of illness you're dealing with. They will also be able to give you advice for the appropriate treatment and recommendations. For example:

- **If you're sick with the flu,** your doctor may prescribe an antiviral drug. These drugs can make your flu milder and shorten the time you are sick.

- **If you're sick with RSV,** the treatment may depend on age. Older adults and babies are most at risk of developing severe illness. Last year, the FDA approved an antibody therapy for infants younger than 8 months old that your doctor may prescribe.

- **If you're sick with a cold,** typical treatment includes rest, fluids, and over-the-counter medicines.

Our Respiratory Dashboard can help you keep track of where things stand with COVID, flu, RSV and more this respiratory season.

The homepage of our Dane County Respiratory Dashboard will be your big picture snapshot of main takeaways. This aims to answer questions like "is there a lot of COVID out there?" or "is the flu finally going down?" There's a weekly summary section that separates COVID, flu, RSV, and all respiratory illnesses combined.

There's a lot more to discover in our dashboard, we walk you through some of the highlights in our blog.