

Suspected acute respiratory infection in over 16s: assessment at first presentation and initial management

Information for the public

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Suspected acute respiratory infection: the care you should expect

An acute respiratory infection (ARI) is an illness that starts suddenly and can last for up to 3 weeks. It causes symptoms such as cough (which may be productive), sore throat, shortness of breath, wheezing and chest discomfort or pain. However, other illnesses and conditions may cause similar symptoms.

Many ARIs get better without medicines and can be safely managed at home. The [NHS website](#) has useful advice about how to manage the symptoms of ARI. It also has information about when to get help from your pharmacist, general practice or NHS 111 and when to call 999. Your general practice may offer a remote or a face-to-face assessment.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with suspected ARIs by making sure that:

- you are given appropriate self-care advice if your symptoms can be safely managed at home and are told how to seek medical help if you don't start to feel better after a specified time or start to feel worse
- you are offered a face-to-face assessment if an adequate assessment cannot be made remotely, a serious illness is suspected (symptoms of concern include shortness of breath and confusion that is new or increased) or you have an underlying condition that may be made worse by having an ARI
- you are only given antibiotics if your healthcare practitioner is confident that they are needed
- if you have been diagnosed with pneumonia following a face-to-face assessment, you and your healthcare practitioner discuss and agree the best place for you to be treated (this may be in hospital or at home, with support if needed)
- your overall health, including any underlying long-term conditions or coexisting illnesses, is considered when decisions are made about treatment or referral for further assessment.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare practitioner should give you clear information, listen carefully to your needs, preferences and values and talk with you about your options.

If you need more support to understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare practitioner.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by ARI and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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