

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you develop a cough. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

## Could it be Coronavirus?

### A new, continuous cough could be coronavirus (Covid-19)

#### Main symptoms

The main symptoms of coronavirus are:

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature).
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Most people with coronavirus have at least 1 of these symptoms.

#### What to do if you have symptoms

If you have any of the main symptoms of coronavirus:

1. Get a test to check if you have coronavirus as soon as possible.
2. Stay at home and do not have visitors until you get your test result – only leave your home to have a test.

Visit NHS .UK:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

Here you will find the latest advice on symptoms, how to book a test and advice on when and how long you, your household and your 'bubble' need to isolate

## Useful facts about coughs

### What causes coughs?

A sudden cough is most commonly caused by a virus infection in connection with a cold or flu, but could be coronavirus (see above). A longer-lasting cough is more common in smokers and people with underlying lung problems such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). A longer-lasting cough may also be more

common in those with allergies such as hay fever. Other conditions such as heartburn (gastric reflux) as well as certain medicines or dusty workplaces can also make you cough.

### Frequency

Many adults get a respiratory infection between 2-5 times a year.

## What can I expect to happen?

### Coughs are usually harmless

Although a cough can be distressing (both for yourself and others living or working with you), acute coughs that are not coronavirus-related tend to be harmless and usually improve within three weeks.

### No need for antibiotics

When you have a cough from a virus infection, you won't need antibiotics. They won't work and may do more harm than good. But note the section below on when to seek medical advice.

### Duration

Coughs usually last up to three weeks, but can last for up to eight weeks. Coughs can be dry or may come with a thick mucus (phlegm).

### Testing for coronavirus

A new continuous cough may be a sign of coronavirus for which you should order a test via NHS111 Online or by calling 119. See the section on coronavirus above.

## What can I do to help myself now and in the future?

**Remember that you can ask your pharmacist for advice.**

**Paracetamol and ibuprofen:** Paracetamol and ibuprofen can help with relieving symptoms that may come with a cough and cold, such as a sore throat, fever, and not feeling well. Always read the label and instructions before using them.

**Cough mixtures and medicines:** For many over the counter medicines we don't know how well they work, but you may still find them useful. A herbal medicine, pelargonium is sometimes used for over 12s as are cough remedies containing guaifenesin. Speak with your pharmacist.

**Home remedies:** Simple home remedies, such as 'honey and lemon' can help. Add freshly squeezed juice from half a lemon and one to two teaspoons of honey to a mug of boiled water and drink while still warm.

**Water:** Drink at least six to nine glasses of water in a day, especially if you feel thirsty.

**Rest:** Get plenty of rest.

**Stop smoking:** Smoking is a common reason for an ongoing cough. If you can stop smoking – or at least smoke less – your cough is likely to get better in the long-term. You'll feel better and your health will also benefit in other ways – visit the NHS Website for details at <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/>.

## When should I seek medical help?

**A new continuous cough may be coronavirus - see section above before reading further**

**Seek medical advice if you feel more unwell than you'd expect or if you notice any of the warning symptoms below:**

**Severity:** Your cough is really bad or gets worse quickly – especially if it's a 'hacking' cough or you can't stop coughing;

**Duration:** Your cough lasts longer than three weeks;

**Foreign body:** You cough after you've choked on something;

**Chest or shoulder pain:** You have chest and/or shoulder pain

**Breathlessness:** You also find it harder to breathe, or you breathe faster than normal;

**Blood:** Seek medical advice if you cough up small amounts of blood. If you cough up larger amounts, seek medical advice urgently;

**Swollen glands:** The side of your neck feels swollen and painful;

**You have a weakened immune system:** For example, through diabetes or chemotherapy.

## Where can I find out more?

**Visit NHS 111 Online for further details about Covid: <https://111.nhs.uk/>**

Check out the NHS Website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) for further information and speak with your pharmacist who can help you with assessing and managing your symptoms.

Call 111 if you can't speak with your GP surgery and don't know what to do next.

**Key references:**

1. NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
2. NICE Clinical Knowledge Summary 'Cough' (April 2020). <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/cough/>
3. NHS Website 'Cough': <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cough/>