



# Viral Infections: Treating Older Adults

Respiratory viruses commonly cause illness such as flu, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), especially in the fall and winter. Every year, these viruses cause hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths. Below are tips to help treat viral infections and use antibiotics appropriately.



Avoid fluoroquinolones in general, and especially in acute bronchitis and acute sinusitis. They cause serious side effects and likely won't help, as these illnesses are usually caused by a virus.



More than 80% of COPD exacerbation can be managed in the nursing home with an inhaler. Steroids may be considered. Antibiotics are not needed in most cases.



Consider antibiotics for acute rhino-sinusitis in residents with:

- Symptoms for > 10 days
- Onset of severe symptoms
- High fever, purulent nasal drainage, or facial pain for 3+ days
- Onset of worsening symptoms following a viral illness that lasted 5 days that is not improving



Test older adults with flu-like symptoms or nonspecific general complaints for COVID-19, flu, and RSV before starting antibiotics.

Antibiotics are never needed for the common cold.

## COVID-19

*Treatment:* Nirmatrelvir (Paxlovid) and ritonavir (Norvir)  
-Initiate treatment within 5 days of symptom onset

*Prevention:* Keep older adults and staff up to date on COVID-19 immunizations according to the latest CDC recommendations.

## Influenza

*Treatment:* Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or baloxavir (Xofluza) are recommended for older adults. Consider prophylactic use during nursing home outbreaks.

*Prevention:* Vaccinate older adults and healthcare professionals yearly with influenza vaccine.

## RSV

*Treatment:* Drink plenty of fluids and manage symptoms such as fever and pain with over-the-counter medications.

*Prevention:* Adults aged 60 and older may be vaccinated with a single dose of RSV vaccine using shared clinical decision making.