# UK braces for a 'quin-demic' as multiple respiratory viruses surge this winter



The UK faces the prospect of a 'quin-demic' this winter, with simultaneous surges in Covid-19, flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), rhinovirus, and norovirus infections potentially placing intense pressure on the National Health Service (NHS). Experts are warning that the healthcare system, already burdened by record waiting lists and staffing shortages, could be pushed to breaking point if these viruses continue to increase in tandem.

Two emerging Covid variants, Stratus and Nimbus, are already driving a sharp rise in infections. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) reports that Covid test positivity has climbed from 7.6% to 8.4% within a week, accompanied by a rise in hospitalisations from 2.0 to 2.7 per 100,000 people. While these new variants are believed to spread more easily than earlier strains, they do not appear to be more severe in terms of illness. Nevertheless, the combined effect with other circulating viruses is causing alarm among virologists and health professionals.

Influenza activity is also climbing earlier than expected, notably among schoolchildren aged five to 14, where positive flu tests more than doubled from 1.9 to 4.1 per 100,000 as the new school term began. RSV, a major cause of chest infections in infants and vulnerable adults, has similarly increased—from 0.27 to 0.44 per 100,000 cases in mid-September—according to UKHSA data. For most, RSV causes cold-like symptoms, but it can be dangerous for babies under six months, the elderly, smokers, and those with pre-existing lung or heart conditions. Cases of rhinovirus, the main culprit behind the common cold, almost doubled between late summer and September, raising concerns especially for those with asthma or compromised health.

Norovirus, the highly contagious stomach bug responsible for vomiting and diarrhoea outbreaks, remains at relatively low levels currently. However, experts recall last winter’s surge, which led to wards closing and significant workforce shortages due to illness. The virus can be particularly debilitating for elderly and frail individuals due to the risk of dehydration. As NHS websites have reported over a million visits seeking norovirus advice, public anxiety about this virus remains high amid the rising pressure from respiratory infections.

The confluence of these viruses follows a pattern seen last year, when a similar 'perfect storm' of flu and RSV overwhelmed hospital capacity, forced cancellation of thousands of operations, and extended waiting times. Professor Lawrence Young, a virologist at Warwick University, warned that without strong uptake of flu and Covid vaccinations, the NHS could face "extremely severe burdens" this winter. He emphasised the importance of vaccination campaigns, noting that Australia, which recently experienced a severe flu season, provides a cautionary precedent for the UK.

In response to these concerns, the UKHSA has launched an integrated infectious disease data dashboard, updated weekly, to offer transparent public monitoring of multiple respiratory viruses including Covid-19, influenza, RSV, adenovirus, and others. This tool aims to enhance public awareness and help guide health responses during the winter season.

Health authorities have urged vulnerable groups, including over-75s, pregnant women, care home residents, and immunocompromised individuals, to receive Covid and flu boosters. For children, nasal spray flu vaccines are being offered, with community pharmacies now able to administer these to toddlers for the first time. Some high street pharmacies also provide private Covid vaccinations, reflecting efforts to increase coverage.

The challenge for the NHS this winter extends beyond managing case numbers, as overlapping symptoms of these viruses complicate diagnosis and treatment. Common symptoms such as cough, fever, fatigue, and sore throat can be indicative of various illnesses. The NHS advises seeking medical attention if symptoms worsen, persist beyond ten days, or include chest pain, severe breathlessness, confusion, or feeding difficulties in children.

NHS leaders have cautioned that this winter could be one of the most demanding in recent memory due to the combined effects of the 'quin-demic,' existing waiting lists, workforce constraints, and potential industrial action. Professor Young reiterated the crucial role of personal responsibility in mitigating strain on health services: "If you're unwell, don't shrug it off. Stay home, rest, and avoid passing it on. These small steps can make the difference between a service coping, and a service in crisis."

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15158571/covid-rsv-norovirus-flu-quindemic-NHS-winter-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-urges-vaccination-against-respiratory-viruses-ahead-of-winter)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15158571/covid-rsv-norovirus-flu-quindemic-NHS-winter-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-flu-and-covid-19-surveillance-reports-2025-to-2026-season/national-flu-and-covid-19-surveillance-report-11-september-2025-week-37)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15158571/covid-rsv-norovirus-flu-quindemic-NHS-winter-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/surveillance-of-influenza-and-other-seasonal-respiratory-viruses-in-winter-2021-to-2022)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15158571/covid-rsv-norovirus-flu-quindemic-NHS-winter-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2025/03/over-a-million-norovirus-web-hits-this-winter-amid-quad-demic/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15158571/covid-rsv-norovirus-flu-quindemic-NHS-winter-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-launches-new-infectious-disease-data-dashboard), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-urges-vaccination-against-respiratory-viruses-ahead-of-winter)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15158571/covid-rsv-norovirus-flu-quindemic-NHS-winter-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-urges-vaccination-against-respiratory-viruses-ahead-of-winter)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15158571/covid-rsv-norovirus-flu-quindemic-NHS-winter-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15158571/covid-rsv-norovirus-flu-quindemic-NHS-winter-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-launches-new-infectious-disease-data-dashboard> - The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has introduced a new dashboard to centralise and publicly share data on infectious diseases and outbreaks for the winter season. This tool, updated weekly, provides information on respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), adenovirus, human metapneumovirus (hMPV), parainfluenza, and rhinovirus, aiming to enhance transparency and public awareness.
3. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2025/03/over-a-million-norovirus-web-hits-this-winter-amid-quad-demic/> - During the winter season, the NHS recorded over a million visits to its norovirus advice page, highlighting the public's concern amid a 'quad-demic' of viruses. This surge in web traffic coincided with record levels of norovirus cases in hospitals, underscoring the importance of accessible health information during peak infection periods.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-urges-vaccination-against-respiratory-viruses-ahead-of-winter> - The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is urging the public to get vaccinated against flu, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) ahead of the winter months. With rising cases of these viruses, UKHSA emphasizes the importance of vaccinations to protect vulnerable groups and reduce the spread of infections during the colder season.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-flu-and-covid-19-surveillance-reports-2025-to-2026-season/national-flu-and-covid-19-surveillance-report-11-september-2025-week-37> - The UK Health Security Agency's surveillance report for week 37 of 2025 indicates a slight increase in influenza positivity to 1.6% and a decrease in SARS-CoV-2 positivity to 6.2%. RSV positivity remained stable at 0.3%, with the highest rates observed in children under five, highlighting ongoing monitoring of respiratory viruses.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/surveillance-of-influenza-and-other-seasonal-respiratory-viruses-in-winter-2021-to-2022> - The UK Health Security Agency's surveillance report for the winter of 2021 to 2022 reveals that rhinovirus was the most common non-influenza respiratory pathogen, detected in 3.3% of positive samples. RSV was the second most common, followed by human metapneumovirus (hMPV), adenovirus, and parainfluenza, providing insights into the prevalence of various respiratory viruses.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/surveillance-of-influenza-and-other-seasonal-respiratory-viruses-in-the-uk-winter-2022-to-2023?trk=public_post_comment-text> - The UK Health Security Agency's surveillance report for the winter of 2022 to 2023 indicates that RSV was the second most common non-influenza respiratory pathogen, detected in 30.5% of positive samples. Adenovirus, hMPV, and parainfluenza followed, highlighting the diversity of respiratory viruses circulating during that period.