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People are still being advised to get tested for Covid-19 and not self-diagnose  
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CORONAVIRUS

## 'Super-cold' complaints on the rise

[Kat Lay](#), Health Editor

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Increasing numbers of patients are calling 111 or their GP with symptoms of a so-called super-cold.

Experts said this was unlikely to represent a new strain of the coronavirus but was the result of 18 months of social distancing cutting levels of immunity against regular, seasonal colds. They urged people not to self-diagnose but to seek a coronavirus test if they experienced a cough, temperature or loss of taste and smell. Health officials said people with cold or flu-like symptoms should stay at home to stop the spread.

Recent days have seen large numbers of people complain on social media of suffering “the [worst cold ever](#)”.

Alan McNally, professor of microbial evolutionary genomics at the University of Birmingham, who led Covid-19 testing efforts at the Milton Keynes Lighthouse Lab, said: “Trying to self-diagnose is a surefire way to send Covid-19 case rates soaring again.”

Data from the UK Health Security Agency shows that calls to 111 about colds and flu, a cough or difficulty breathing are increasing and above expected levels, with a particular increase in calls concerning patients aged 15 to 44. GP services too have seen increases in patients seeking help with lower and upper respiratory tract infections.

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Conall Watson, a consultant epidemiologist at the agency, said: “With a number of viruses circulating this winter, we should all take measures to protect ourselves and one another. Hand-washing, ventilation and wearing a mask, especially in crowded settings, keep germs at bay.”

Figures from the Royal College of General Practitioners show that the incidence of the common cold is about a third higher than this time last year, at 3.1 per 100,000 people in the week ending October 3, compared with 2.1 in the week ending October 4, 2020.

In London, levels went from 1.8 per 100,000 in the week ending September 26 to 4.2 per 100,000 in the week ending October 3. In the north of England, levels went from 2.5 to 3, in the south from 2.4 to 2.5, and in the Midlands and east of England from 2.6 to 2.9.

Dr Mohammed Abbas Khaki, a GP in London, said that there was “a horrific cold going around”. He added that he had been telling patients to “stay at home until they feel well”.

Professor Neil Mabbott, an immunopathology expert from the University of Edinburgh, said: “This highlights the power of the lockdown, mask-wearing, social distancing and sanitation measures introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only was this very effective in reducing transmission of the coronavirus but at the same time, it had the additional benefit

of reducing the spread of colds and other common transmissible diseases.

“It is unlikely we are seeing the circulation of a ‘super-cold’. Rather, our immune systems have had limited exposure to colds over the past 18 months so ... will be less effective against colds.”

Mabbott added that a significant rise was to be expected after pandemic measures were eased and people increasingly began to mix indoors and use public transport.

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