The tale of the virus that stole Christmas

How was Christmas? I asked a friend. ‘It wasn’t,’ she replied. ‘I had flu so I missed it.’ Like me, she had caught the viral infection that is currently rife, the one that makes you cough until your chest nearly explodes.

Although it is not actually influenza, to dub this virus merely ‘a cold’ fails to convey its severity. The fever, the hacking cough, the debility – hardly a mere sniffl e. Calling it a cold doesn’t explain why you are out of action for a week or two.

If the Inuit have over 50 words for snow, surely the English language could come up with a word for a winter bug that is not quite flu but is its vicious little sister?

Previous generations might have called it a ‘severe chill’, but that was a vague term relating to any acute illness, from a UTI (a chill in the bladder) to conjunctivitis (a chill in the eye). It never got you much sympathy, so good riddance to it.

‘Virus’ is even less specific – it could mean anything from a wart to pneumonia. We need a term that has the ‘ta-da’ factor, that you can put on a sick note without shame.

I think we should call it The Grinch. I’m sure Dr Seuss wouldn’t mind. It describes perfectly the noise my lungs were making when I was trying to breathe.

And for many of us, it tried to steal Christmas.

Jane Bates is an ophthalmic nurse in Hampshire