

With Respiratory Viruses Ticking Up, IDPH Encourages Illinoisans To Get Fully Protected

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CHICAGO – With hospitalizations for COVID-19 rising in the state ahead of the Thanksgiving Holiday, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is urging Illinoisans to stay informed about conditions in their area and to take steps to get fully protected from the range of seasonal viruses as cases rise. Twenty counties in Illinois are listed at a medium level for hospitalizations according to the [CDC's national COVID Data Tracker](#) as of the week ending November 11. Across the state, 740 hospitalizations were recorded, a 17% increase from the previous week. The uptick in COVID-19 hospitalizations comes as hospital data is also showing increases in flu and RSV.

“As hospitalizations for COVID-19, RSV, and flu increase across Illinois, I want to encourage our residents to use all of the tools at their disposal to protect themselves and their loved ones this Thanksgiving Holiday weekend,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer

Vohra. “Vaccines for COVID-19, flu and RSV remain the most effective tool in preventing severe illness, but we can all take proper precautions to enjoy family, food, and fun while keeping those germs away.”

Dr. Vohra stressed that holiday hosts should enhance the safety of guests by providing [proper indoor ventilation](#), encouraging [good hand hygiene](#), and reminding guests to [cover coughs and sneezes](#). If someone is feeling symptoms of a respiratory virus – such as coughing, sneezing, sore throat, a runny nose or fever - it’s best to get tested and stay home if sick.”

IDPH is also encouraging all healthcare settings to consider masking in patient care areas especially if caring for those with weakened immune systems as both RSV and Covid-19 are rising. Per CDC recommendations: Universal masking should be considered facility-wide or, based on a facility risk assessment, targeted toward higher risk areas (e.g., emergency departments, urgent care) or patient populations (e.g., when caring for patients with moderate to severe immunocompromise) during periods of higher levels of community COVID-19 or other respiratory virus transmission.

It is easy to track data by county on a [new national respiratory virus dashboard](#) launched by the CDC this fall that allows the public to view weekly updates on the levels of COVID-19, flu and RSV.

In addition, the federal government announced that as of November 20, every household in the U.S. is eligible to receive four free at-home tests through the [COVID.gov](#) website.

For those who are uninsured or under-insured, the CDC this summer launched the [Bridge Access Program](#) that will cover the cost of COVID-19 vaccines this fall. The [Vaccines for Children Program](#) will cover vaccines for eligible children.

On September 22, ACIP recommended seasonal administration of one dose of RSV vaccine during weeks 32 through 36 of pregnancy, to maximize protection for babies after birth. Given limited availability of nirsevimab to protect newborns, those who are pregnant are encouraged to get this vaccine from now through January if they expect to deliver during RSV season.

For treatment of COVID-19, Illinoisans who experience symptoms can access no cost-share telehealth services through the [SIU School of Medicine Covid Test to Treat](#) services or call (217) 545-5100.

U.S. government supplied courses of antivirals will continue to be provided free of charge to those with Medicare, Medicaid and the uninsured until supplies run out. Paxlovid and Lagevrio are now commercially available as well.

The federal government has established a website that provides an all-purpose toolkit with information on how to obtain masks, treatment, vaccines and testing resources for all areas of the country at: <https://www.covid.gov/>.