

Seasonal Respiratory Viruses Circulating Widely in Illinois Following the Holidays

January 7 2024 2:54 PM



CHICAGO – As Illinois' overall respiratory illness level has increased from Moderate to [High](#) in the past week and more than half the counties in the state are at an elevated level for COVID-19 hospitalizations, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reminding the public to stay up-to-date on all respiratory illness vaccines and to stay home and seek treatment if you are sick. This health guidance is being offered as seasonal respiratory viruses - including COVID-19, flu and RSV - are circulating widely

and the CDC is reporting that 61 Illinois counties are at either High or Medium level for COVID-19 hospital admissions, according to the [CDC's national COVID Data Tracker](#), as of the week ending December 23.

A total of 18 counties in Illinois are listed at High level for COVID-19 hospitalizations (compared to 14 counties in the week prior) and 43 are at a Medium level in the latest week (compared to 50 counties in the week prior), including Cook, DuPage, Lake and McHenry counties. Statewide, 1,381 new COVID-19 hospitalizations were reported, an increase of 7.7% over the previous week. However only about 24% of adult Illinoisans are up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine per the [CDC's National Immunization Survey](#).

[Flu activity](#) is now surging to match the pre-COVID-19 2019-2020 season while RSV activity overall appears to have stabilized though a slight increase in RSV admissions in infants was noted this past week. IDPH has also confirmed two pediatric deaths due to influenza and is investigating a third potential death, all with December onsets. This is a sobering reminder of the potential severity of influenza in children and the importance of vaccination.

“The winter holiday season typically results in an increase in seasonal respiratory viruses, and we are seeing that again this year, with certain areas of Illinois feeling increased hospital strain,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “I encourage all Illinoisians - and especially those most vulnerable to serious illness - to stay informed about respiratory illnesses in their area and use all the tools available to keep themselves and their loved ones safe. These tools include washing your hands, covering your coughs and sneezes, improving indoor air ventilation, and wearing a mask in crowded areas. And it is not too late to get vaccinated for all the shots for which you are eligible. Receiving immunizations for COVID-19, flu, RSV, as well as pneumonia helps prevent serious illness and hospitalization.”

If people develop symptoms of a respiratory illness – including coughing, sneezing, sore throat, a runny nose or fever – IDPH recommends staying home and away from others to avoid spreading illness. If you need to seek medical care, you should wear a mask to limit the risk to others – or try to schedule a telehealth appointment. In addition, public health experts urge anyone who has been recently exposed to COVID-19 or other respiratory viruses to wear a mask when in crowded areas, and if visiting someone at high risk for severe disease. For more on when and where to use a mask, [click HERE](#).

The [updated COVID-19 shots](#) are effective against the currently dominant Covid-19 variants and are recommended for all people 6 months and older. People with egg allergy may now get any [flu vaccine](#) (egg-based or non-egg-based) that is otherwise appropriate for their age and health status and do not need to limit themselves to non-egg based shots alone. Those older than 65 years should receive any one of the higher

dose or “adjuvanted” influenza shots. The [RSV shots](#) are now available for those over 60 years and pregnant people. Older adults with [risk factors for RSV](#) should talk to their provider about which shot is right for them. The pneumonia (pneumococcal) shots are also recommended for children, people with weakened immune systems and older adults and will protect people from getting seriously ill with the type of pneumonias that often follow viral infections.

To help keep the public informed about conditions around the state, IDPH recently launched an [Infectious Respiratory Disease Surveillance Dashboard](#) that will be updated weekly on Fridays. This report provides the public the latest data on hospital visits, seasonal trends, lab test positivity and demographic data.

It is also easy to track data at the county level 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.

IDPH launched a new awareness campaign this fall called [‘Tis the Sneezin’](#) to remind Illinoisans that vaccinations provide the best protection against the triple threat of COVID-19, flu and RSV.

Every household in the U.S. is eligible to receive four free at-home tests through the [COVID.gov](#) website. IDPH has also made available a single swab triple-test for Flu /RSV and Covid-19, at no cost, to high risk congregate care settings and local health departments.

For those who are uninsured or under-insured, the CDC launched the [Bridge Access Program](#) last year that covers the cost of COVID-19 vaccines. The [Vaccines for Children Program](#) covers all ACIP recommended vaccines for eligible children, including nirsevimab for RSV protection.

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. An additional option is the [NIH Test to Treat line](#) or call 1-800-682-2829 to get access to no-cost care.

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/>.