



NEWS RELEASE

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IDPH Adopts New CDC Guidelines that Streamline Recommendations for COVID-19, Flu and RSV

New CDC Guidance Issued as Flu Cases Push Illinois from Low to Moderate Respiratory Infection Activity Level

CHICAGO – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) announced today that it is adopting updated guidance from the CDC that streamline and simplify recommendations for dealing with the range of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, flu and RSV. The new guidance focuses on protecting those most at risk of serious illness.

The CDC guidance was issued as data indicate respiratory viruses are continuing to circulate around Illinois and the state’s overall respiratory virus level has moved up from Low to [Moderate](#) based on an uptick in flu reports. The state remained at Low level for COVID-19 hospitalizations, according to the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#) as of February 24. The data showed that [six counties are at Medium level](#) for COVID-19 hospitalizations, down from eight the previous week. There are no counties at High level for COVID-19 hospitalizations.

Also this week on Wednesday, the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) issued a recommendation for a second dose of the current 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines that were authorized last fall to be given to those over 65 years of age. Those who are immunosuppressed remain eligible to receive additional doses 2 months after their previous dose. A [CDC presentation](#) that was provided for the ACIP meeting included preliminary data that showed that COVID-19 hospital admissions remained much higher than flu during the summer months and that 96% of those hospitalized for COVID-19 in the fall of 2023, had not received the updated Covid shot last fall. This implies that the current shot is highly protective against serious outcomes.

“IDPH appreciates the new guidance from the CDC that streamlines recommendations across respiratory viruses and provides simple, clear and easy to understand steps for those with COVID-19, flu and RSV,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “These new guidelines put the emphasis correctly on protecting those who are most vulnerable to serious illness and hospitalizations. While Illinois is in a better position than we were two months ago, the State is

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currently experiencing an uptick in our overall respiratory illness level. Individuals 65 and over, those who are immunocompromised, and individuals with chronic medical conditions remain most vulnerable to severe outcomes, and they should continue to use all tools at their disposal to keep themselves protected.

“Flu season can last until May, and it is not too late to get your flu shot if you haven’t already,” Dr. Vohra added. “The CDC also released new recommendations this week that allow older adults to now receive an additional dose of this season’s COVID-19 vaccine. An additional dose for those at highest risk can add protection this spring and summer.”

The new CDC guidance no longer requires that those who test positive for COVID-19 should isolate for a minimum of five days before returning to work or other activities and instead focuses on isolation until symptoms improve – which could be shorter or longer than five days. The key recommendation for those with any seasonal respiratory virus is to stay home and away from others until their symptoms improve.

The guidance suggests people can return to normal activities when symptoms have been improving for 24 hours - and if a fever was present, it has been gone for 24 hours without use of a fever-reducing medication.

In addition, once people resume normal activities, they are encouraged to take precautions for the next five days to curb disease spread, including:

- Taking more steps for cleaner air
- Enhancing hygiene practices
- Wearing a well-fitting mask
- Keeping a distance from others and/or
- Getting tested to inform your actions to prevent spread to others.

These precautions also apply to those who never had symptoms but tested positive for a common seasonal respiratory virus and are especially important when it comes to protecting those most at risk for severe illness, including those over 65 and people with weakened immune systems.

In addition, IDPH officials pointed to a [new study by researchers](#) that found that among U.S. adults at risk for severe COVID-19, the lowest rate of hospitalization was found to be among those receiving three or more mRNA vaccine doses and Paxlovid. Adults who are at high-risk of severe COVID-19 disease, including vaccinated persons, should be considered for antiviral treatment.

With RSV season now winding down in Illinois, the use of the RSV vaccine in pregnancy is no longer warranted. However, the shots that can be used to provide infants and young children protective immunity to RSV will continue to be available until the end of the season, and older adults can continue to get their RSV vaccine even after the season is declared over.

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

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/>.

In addition, the federal government has established helplines to provide information and resources to for people with disabilities and older people:

- The [Disability Information and Access Line \(DIAL\)](#) can help people with disabilities find local vaccination clinics, connect with accessible transportation, and provide other assistance in accessing COVID-19 vaccinations.
- The [Eldercare Locator](#) is a national resource funded by the Administration for Community Living that can help older adults find local vaccination clinics, connect with accessible transportation, and provide other assistance in accessing vaccinations.

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