

# Protect Our Local Healthcare System: Public Health Urges Vaccination as Respiratory Virus Season Kicks Off

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As respiratory virus season gets under way, Clatsop County Department of Public Health is urging residents to take advantage of newly recommended vaccines to stave off another COVID-19, influenza (flu) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) wave that besieged hospitals last fall.



“RSV is a common, contagious virus usually causes mild cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in a week or two, but RSV can be serious. Infants and older adults are more likely to develop severe RSV and need hospitalization,” said Public Health Director Jiancheng Huang.

The potential for another respiratory surge that swamps hospitals and health care system still exists. Communities with high rates of vaccine coverage will be able to avoid overburdening local healthcare system, allowing those with severe infections get timely treatment.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon has seen a steady increase in COVID-19 test positivity since late spring – from 4.3% on May 27 to around 15% by Sept. 16 – and a doubling of COVID-19 hospitalizations since June 21, when the daily count was at 106.

While flu and RSV activity remains low, cases are expected to rise, as typical, during fall months, with students back in school, and people heading indoors to escape colder temperatures and gather during the holidays.

“We also strongly recommend that people wear a mask in health care settings where patients at highest risk of severe disease are cared for, such as nursing facilities and hospitals,” Huang said. “Individuals most at risk for severe disease include those with compromised immune systems, those with underlying health conditions, and who are 65 and older.”

Vaccination is the best way for people to protect themselves and those around them from infection and reduce the risk of severe illness – particularly for vulnerable individuals like older adults, and those who are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions – that could lead to hospitalization or death.

The new COVID-19 vaccines, along with an updated version of the seasonal flu vaccine, may soon be available at some pharmacies and clinics, with more doses expected to arrive in Oregon over the next several weeks. A new RSV vaccine for adults 60 and older is now available on the commercial market.

The vaccines for all three viruses have been extensively tested and are safe and effective.

Insurance plans will cover the 2023–2024 COVID-19 vaccine when they become available. The Affordable Care Act requires insurers to cover most recommended vaccines without cost sharing, such as co-pays or deductibles.

People can get COVID-19 and influenza vaccines by contacting their health plan, health care provider, county public health clinic or federally qualified health center (FQHC). They can also search for a clinic by ZIP code by visiting [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov), or by calling 211 or visiting [211info.org](https://www.211info.org).