

# Holiday Season Gears Up Alongside Respiratory Viruses

News Release Date

11-22-2022

*POSTED: Nov. 14, 2022*

As people gear up for the holiday season, Clatsop County Public Health Department is encouraging residents to take steps to avoid becoming ill from respiratory viruses circulating in Oregon and the United States.

“Right now, there are three prominent viruses we are concerned about,” said Jiancheng Huang, Clatsop County public health director. “They are RSV, influenza (the flu) and COVID variants. We continue monitoring community respiratory virus activities.”

Lisa McClean, public health nurse manager added, “We encourage people to take four preventive steps.

1. “First, stay current with vaccines. Anyone six months or older are encouraged to get the annual flu vaccine. If your child has not started their primary series of the COVID vaccine, we encourage that, too.
2. “Second, take care with your personal hygiene. Frequently wash your hands and cover your nose when sneezing and your mouth when coughing.
3. “Third, when sick, stay home. Do not go to work, school, or take a trip.
4. “Fourth, if you’re feeling sick, wear a mask.”

## **RSV - Respiratory Syncytial Virus**

Pediatric hospitalizations more than tripled in Oregon between Oct. 29 and Nov. 5 due to RSV. “RSV is putting a strain on health care facilities and pediatric units in hospitals,” Huang said.

RSV is very common and most children experience an RSV infection by their second birthday. Most people will become re-infected with RSV during their lifetime. RSV is transmitted through respiratory droplets, direct contact and by touching contaminated surfaces.

RSV symptoms are the same as the common cold and usually mild. They include a runny nose, cough, sneezing, fever and loss of appetite.

RSV can cause severe disease in children under 2 years old — especially infants under 6 months old, older adults and people with underlying medical conditions

An RSV vaccine is not available and influenza and COVID-19 vaccines do not protect against RSV.

If your child has RSV symptoms:

- If symptoms are mild, keep your child home.
- Use over-the-counter medicine to manage fever and pain, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Never give aspirin to children.
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

If symptoms are severe or quickly get worse, contact a health care provider or pediatrician before going to an emergency room. If you do not have a health care provider, call 211 for help finding one.

Warning signs that require immediate attention include difficulty breathing — or breathing very quickly— and dehydration.

## **Influenza “the flu”**

Although influenza activity remains relatively low in Oregon, it is increasing slowly. Statewide test positivity was 2% last week. It is projected that the positivity rate will surpass 5% within two weeks, which is considered a threshold for significant influenza circulation.

## **COVID**

Oregon is seeing slow increases in the proportion of new Omicron subvariants with mutations of concerns, such as BQ.1 and BQ.1.1. These new subvariants account for less than 10% of variants circulating in Oregon. The BA.5 still accounts for about 80%.

COVID-19 transmission is expected to increase as people gather indoors and immunity from vaccination and previous infections wanes. An Oregon Health and Science University forecast predicts that COVID-19 hospitalizations will increase slightly and peak by early December.

## **Staying Healthy**

Although there is not an RSV vaccine, the influenza and COVID vaccines are widely available and effective. Getting your COVID and flu shots as soon as possible will protect yourself and your loved ones during the holiday gatherings. Here are three things you can do:

- Step up your personal hygiene. Cover your coughs and sneezes. Clean and disinfect surfaces that are often touched, such as doorknobs and electronic devices. Wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds.
- Mask indoors when with people from outside households, especially those at increased risk of severe illness. Also, wear a mask in crowded indoor settings, especially if you or

someone in your home is at high risk for severe disease.

- Look out for young children. Provide additional protection to children under 2 years who are unable to mask— in particular those under 6 months— by asking visitors to wear a mask.

For more information or to schedule a vaccine appointment, contact Clatsop County Public Health Department at 503-325-8500.