

Respiratory Virus Guidance Talking Points

The Guidance

- CDC's updated guidance **unites and streamlines** recommendations for dealing with a range of common respiratory viral illnesses, such as COVID-19, flu, and RSV.
- The updated recommendations **continue to protect those most at risk for severe illness** from COVID, flu, and RSV.
- While every respiratory virus does not act the same, adopting a unified approach makes recommendations **easier to understand and thus more likely to be followed**.
- People often don't know which virus they have, and data indicate that many people don't test.
- As part of the guidance, CDC provides active recommendations on **core prevention strategies**:
 - **Staying up to date with vaccination** to protect people against serious illness, hospitalization, and death. This includes flu, COVID-19, and RSV if eligible.
 - **Practicing good hygiene** by covering coughs and sneezes, washing or sanitizing hands often, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces.
 - **Taking steps for cleaner air**, such as bringing in more fresh outside air, purifying indoor air, or gathering outdoors.
- CDC's first recommendation for people who get sick with a respiratory virus is simple: **Stay home** and away from others.
- It suggests **returning to normal activities when** symptoms have been getting better overall for 24 hours, and if a fever was present, it has been gone for 24 hours without use of a fever-reducing medication.
- Once people resume normal activities, they are encouraged to **take precaution for the next 5 days** to curb disease spread, such as:
 - Taking more steps for cleaner air,
 - Enhancing hygiene practices,
 - Wearing a well-fitting mask,
 - Keeping a distance from others, and/or
 - Getting testing to inform your actions to prevent spread to others.
- **Enhanced precautions are especially important to protect those most at risk** for severe illness, including those over 65 and people with weakened immune systems.
- This update is intended for a general audience and community settings. CDC offers separate guidance for healthcare settings. CDC's guidance for health care settings is not changing.

- In addition, CDC has been working with education partners to develop infection prevention and control guidance for schools, which will include information on infection spread and prevention strategies across a number of pathogens that can affect school settings (e.g., norovirus, flu, strep pharyngitis). This guidance will align with the updated Respiratory Virus Guidance and other disease-specific guidance and include considerations for children with special health care needs. We anticipate this guidance being released prior to the next school year.

Why Now?

- Respiratory viruses **remain a public health threat.**
- CDC is making updates to the recommendations now because we are in a **different place regarding COVID.**
- **We also have more tools than ever to combat flu, COVID-19, and RSV,** including vaccines for all three viruses.
 - COVID-19 vaccination reduces the risk of symptomatic disease and hospitalization by about 50% compared to people not up to date on vaccination.
 - Meanwhile, COVID treatment in persons at high risk of severe disease has been shown to decrease risk of hospitalization by 75% and death by 60% in recent studies.
 - More than 95% of people hospitalized with COVID-19 this last season were not up to date on COVID-19 vaccines and most had not received antiviral treatment.
- **We are seeing far fewer hospitalizations and deaths associated with COVID-19**
 - Weekly hospital admissions for COVID-19 have decreased by more than 75% and deaths by more than 90% compared to January 2022.
 - Importantly, these decreases have continued through a full respiratory virus season, despite levels of viral activity similar to prior years.
- **COVID-19 impacts are now similar to other respiratory viruses – but they still pose a significant health threat to those at higher risk.**
 - Studies show the proportion of adults hospitalized with [COVID-19 \(15.5%\)](#) or [influenza \(13.3%\)](#) who were subsequently admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) was similar, and patients 60 years and older hospitalized with RSV were [1.5 times more likely](#) to be admitted to the ICU than those with COVID-19.
- **There is a high degree of population immunity against COVID-19.**
 - More than 98% of the U.S. population now has some degree of protective immunity against COVID-19 from vaccination, prior infection, or both.

Protecting Those Most at Risk

- The CDC recommendations encourage everyone to **stay home when they get sick**, limiting exposure to those at higher risk for severe disease.

- And the guidance continues to focus on those who are at higher risk for severe illness and includes **specific recommendations for groups at higher risk** including older adults, young children, people with compromised immune systems, people with disabilities, and pregnant people.
- States and countries that changed their COVID-19 isolation guidance to recommendations that are similar to CDC's, **did not experience clear increases in community transmission or hospitalization rates.**
- Recent data indicate that California and Oregon, where isolation guidance looks a lot like CDC's updated recommendations, are **not experiencing higher COVID-19 test positivity**, emergency department visits, or hospitalizations.
- This guidance emphasizes how important vaccination and treatment are to protect yourself and those around you from COVID and other viruses. The COVID virus continues to change and is changing at a faster rate than the flu virus. That is why, based on what we know, CDC anticipates there will be an updated COVID vaccine this year and CDC, working with FDA, has started the process to update the COVID vaccine for 2024/25, similar to what happens with the annual flu shot.