



NEWS RELEASE

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IDPH Recommends Healthcare Facilities Adopt Mitigation Measures as Respiratory Viruses Increase

With Rising RSV activity and Increasing COVID-19 Hospitalizations, IDPH Recommends Use of Masking and other Mitigation Measures in Healthcare Settings in Areas of Elevated Transmission

CHICAGO – With 51 counties, or half the counties in Illinois, now at a medium or high level for COVID-19 hospitalizations, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is advising healthcare facilities to step up mitigation efforts to minimize the spread of respiratory viruses. The department has issued a health alert today to hospitals, long-term care facilities, and local health departments outlining various mitigation measures such as the use of masking and screening, especially in areas where more vulnerable patients are treated.

IDPH supports CDC's recommendation of facility-wide masking at healthcare facilities that are in counties rated at high level for COVID-19 hospitalizations or per facility discretion in areas where data shows elevated transmission of other respiratory viruses such as flu and RSV, even if COVID-19 hospitalization levels are not high in those areas.

The number of counties listed at HIGH level for COVID-19 hospitalizations has doubled from five to ten Illinois counties in the center of the state including Sangamon, according to the [CDC's national COVID Data Tracker](#), as of the week ending December 2. That means they have seen more than 20 COVID-19 hospitalizations per 100,000 population in the last week. Another 41 counties are at medium level for COVID-19 hospitalizations during the period, with between 10 and 20 COVID hospitalizations per 100,000.

Statewide, 1,225 new COVID-19 hospitalizations were reported, up 22% over the previous week. IDPH also tracks ED visits and hospitalizations for Flu and RSV. RSV is causing a heavy burden of pediatric hospitalizations and the percent of lab tests that are positive for RSV have been rising for 10 consecutive weeks. COVID-19 is causing the most hospitalizations among respiratory viruses, however hospitalizations are also rising steadily for flu and RSV. The percent of positive lab tests for flu and COVID-19 have been rising for three consecutive weeks.

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“With the alarming rise in respiratory viruses we are seeing across the state and the country, IDPH is recommending healthcare facilities take precautions to reduce the spread of these viruses and protect their patients, staffs and visitors,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “We are most concerned with healthcare facilities in counties with elevated respiratory virus transmission and hospitalization levels and recommend masking in patient care areas, especially in emergency departments and areas caring for patients who are immunocompromised.”

Under the guidance distributed today, healthcare facilities are advised to follow CDC guidance and implement facility-wide masking in counties that have high levels of COVID-19 hospitalizations. In addition, in counties with increased incidence of respiratory illness in the community, hospitals are advised to screen staff and visitors for symptoms of respiratory viruses; to remind visitors entering patient rooms about hand hygiene and cough etiquette; and to encourage those with respiratory symptoms (such as fever, cough or sore throat) to defer non-urgent hospital visits and get tested for respiratory viruses before in-person visits or use telehealth services if possible.

Last week IDPH launched a new, weekly [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.

Ahead of the holidays, IDPH is advising Illinoisans to get fully protected with all of the vaccinations they are eligible for, including COVID-19, flu and RSV.

Holiday hosts are urged to enhance the safety of guests by providing [proper indoor ventilation](#), encouraging [good hand hygiene](#), and reminding guests to [cover coughs and sneezes](#). If someone is feeling symptoms of a respiratory virus – such as coughing, sneezing, sore throat, a runny nose or fever - it’s best to get tested and stay home so as not to spread illness.

The federal government recently announced that every household in the U.S. is eligible to receive four free at-home tests through the [COVID.gov](#) website.

For those who are uninsured or under-insured, the CDC this summer launched the [Bridge Access Program](#) that will cover the cost of COVID-19 vaccines. The [Vaccines for Children Program](#) will cover vaccines for eligible children.

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.



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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/>.

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