

2023 - 2024 Winter Respiratory Illness Preparedness Guide

Last updated 2/13/2024

Why Are Respiratory Illnesses More Common During the Winter?

Colds, influenza (flu), and other respiratory illnesses, like COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), are more common during the winter months. People are gathering indoors, meaning that there is a high risk for respiratory viruses to pass from person to person. In addition, the holidays are often a time for travel and large gatherings.

It's important to use every tool to make sure you and your loved ones stay healthy!

Note: All links in this report go to a webpage on [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

What Can You Do to Prevent Respiratory Illnesses?

Stay Up to Date with Vaccine Guidelines

There are **effective and safe vaccines** available for **flu, COVID-19, and RSV**. They can **protect you against severe illness**.

Flu

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that **everyone 6 months and older to get an annual flu vaccine**. The vaccine is updated every year to best protect against the current strains of the flu that are circulating, so it is important to get a flu shot every year. For more information, [click here](#).

COVID-19

The CDC recommends the **updated COVID-19 vaccine for everyone 6 months and older**. Staying up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines is the best protection against serious illness. To see the recommendations by age groups, [click here](#).

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

This year, the CDC recommends the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine to protect **those who are at the highest risk for getting very sick with RSV, such as infants, toddlers, and adults 60 years and older.**

For information on the RSV vaccine:

- for infants and toddlers, [click here.](#)
- for adults 60 years and older, [click here.](#)

Take Everyday Preventive Actions

- **Frequently wash hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand rub
- **Cover sneezes and coughs** with an elbow or tissue. If you use a tissue, throw it away.
- **Avoid close contact** with individuals you know to be sick.

What Should I Do If I'm Sick?

Stay Home

If you're sick, stay home from work, school, and other activities until you feel better, regardless of if you think you have the flu, COVID-19, RSV, or something else.

While you're at home:

- Isolate away from others to avoid spreading your illness. Stay in a separate bedroom and use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- Cover sneezes and coughs with an elbow or tissue. If you use a tissue, throw it away.
- Frequently disinfect high touch surfaces, like doorknobs.
- Don't share cups and utensils.

Wear a mask if you need to be around others.

Avoid traveling.

Avoid gatherings and events. Instead, join with others via a video or phone call.

Learn More

Flu

If you think you have the flu, to find out:

- About symptoms: [click here.](#)
- About taking care of yourself: [click here.](#)

COVID-19

If you think you have COVID-19, to find out:

- About symptoms: [click here.](#)
- About getting tested: [click here.](#)

If you test positive, [click here.](#)

RSV

If you think you have RSV, to find out:

- About symptoms and care: [click here.](#)

What can employers do?

To find information on what you can do for sick employees, [click here.](#)