



Respiratory Virus Season Frequently Asked Questions

As respiratory virus season approaches, it's important to stay informed and prepared to protect yourself, your family, and your community. We're committed to providing clear and accurate information to help you navigate this season safely. This FAQ addresses common questions about respiratory viruses like the flu, COVID-19, and RSV. Whether you're looking to reduce your risk or seek advice on what to do if you or a loved one becomes ill, we've got you covered with the latest recommendations.

What should I do if I feel respiratory virus symptoms?

- Anyone with respiratory symptoms – such as coughing, a runny nose, or fever – should take precautions to prevent the spread to others.
- This means staying home, if possible, and away from others (unless medical attention is needed) for at least 24 hours until you are fever-free without using fever-reducing medications and symptoms are improving overall.
- If you cannot self-isolate, wear a well-fitted mask around others.
- Upon ending isolation and for the next five days, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends enhanced hygiene practices, wearing a well-fitted mask, and keeping as much physical distance from others as possible when indoors.

How can I get tested to find out what virus I might have?

- Respiratory viruses could be caused by COVID-19, influenza, RSV, or other common viruses, including the common cold.
- It is important, especially if you are vulnerable to severe health outcomes, to get tested to determine what type of virus you are infected with. This will help determine if treatment is available and recommended.
- The federal government is offering every household four free at-home COVID-19 tests again this year.
- At-home test kits for flu and COVID-19 are also sold over the counter and online.
- To get tested in a clinic, contact your health care provider.
- You can find locations that perform testing in person at no cost near you by using the testing locator for the federal ICATT (Increasing Community Access to Testing) program.

What treatment is available for COVID-19?

- Effective antiviral treatments are available for COVID-19, but a health care provider must prescribe them and start within 5-7 days after symptoms appear.
- If you test positive for COVID-19 and are over 65, immunocompromised, or at higher risk for severe illness for some other reason, talk to your health care provider about starting treatment right away, even if your symptoms are mild. If you don't have a health care provider, contact your local pharmacy, community health center, or local health department.

What treatment is available for flu?

- Antiviral treatments for flu are most effective when given within 48 hours of starting to feel ill and are only available by prescription. Older adults, young children, and those who are pregnant or have conditions like diabetes, asthma, and heart disease are at risk for complications and should contact a health care provider to be assessed for the need for treatment as soon as possible.

How can I protect myself and my family from respiratory viruses?

- Staying up to date with vaccinations is the best way to protect yourself and those around you from serious illness, hospitalization, and death.
- 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.
- If you are vulnerable to severe outcomes and you know that respiratory viruses are spreading at elevated rates, consider using a well-fitted mask in indoor places.
- You can find a snapshot of respiratory illness data at IDPH's Seasonal Respiratory Illness Dashboard.

Where can I get vaccinated?

- The new vaccines for COVID-19 and flu are available at pharmacies and through hospitals and community health clinics. The easiest way to find a location near you is the federal vaccines.gov website or IDPH's Vaccine Locator Dashboard.
- The major pharmacy chains allow you to make an appointment online to get a shot.
- Contact your health care provider if you need the RSV vaccine.

Can I get the COVID-19 and flu shots at the same time?

- Yes, there is no downside to getting both shots at the same time. It will also save you the trouble of having to make a second trip to the pharmacy or health provider.

Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I have gotten COVID-19 before and I didn't get that sick?

- The new COVID-19 shots are designed to target the virus strains that are now in circulation, and they are very effective in preventing severe outcomes, including hospitalization and deaths.
- Just because you've been sick with COVID-19 before and it wasn't that serious, it doesn't mean that your symptoms won't be more severe the next time. The vaccines also give you protection against long COVID-19.

What if I don't have health care coverage and can't afford vaccinations?

- If you don't have health care coverage through a private plan, Medicare, or Medicaid, IDPH operates the Vaccines for Children Program, which provides vaccines at no cost for children 18 and under.
- Adults without insurance have several options. They can check with their local health department or use the search capability to contact a free and charitable clinic or Community Health Center.



Fall Vaccines Frequently Asked Questions

Vaccines are one of the most effective tools for protecting yourself and others from serious illnesses, including respiratory viruses like COVID-19, flu, and RSV. We're dedicated to helping you make informed decisions about vaccination. This FAQ covers common questions about vaccine safety, eligibility, and where to get vaccinated. Whether you're looking for details on booster shots, vaccine schedules, or general guidance, this resource provides the information you need to stay protected.

What new vaccines have been approved for this fall and winter?

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends, vaccines for COVID-19, flu, and RSV this fall.
- The updated COVID-19 and flu shots are recommended for everyone over 6 months of age.
- A single dose of RSV vaccine is recommended for adults aged 75 and older and for adults aged 60-74 who are at increased risk for severe RSV disease. Adults who have previously received the RSV vaccine should not receive another dose.

Where can I get the shots?

- The new shots are available at pharmacies, hospitals, and community health clinics. The easiest way to find a location near you is through the federal vaccines.gov website or IDPH's Vaccine Locator Dashboard.
- The major pharmacy chains allow you to make an appointment online for COVID-19 and flu shots.
- Contact your health care provider if you need the RSV vaccine.

Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I have gotten COVID-19 before and I didn't get that sick?

- The new COVID-19 shots are designed to target the strains of the virus currently in circulation. They are very effective in preventing severe outcomes, including hospitalization and deaths.
- Just because you've been sick with COVID-19 before and it wasn't that serious, it doesn't mean your symptoms won't be more severe the next time. The vaccines also provide you with protection against long COVID-19.
- There is also evidence that getting the vaccine can help to prevent transmission of the virus - even if you get sick - by reducing the severity of symptoms like sneezing and coughing. This protects those around you.

Can I get the COVID-19 and flu shots at the same time?

- Yes, there is no downside to getting both shots at the same time. It will also save you the trouble of having to make a second trip to the pharmacy or health care provider.

What if I don't have health care coverage and can't afford vaccinations?

- If you don't have health care coverage, either through a private plan, Medicare, or Medicaid, IDPH operates the Vaccines for Children Program, which provides vaccines at no cost for children 18 and under.
- Adults without insurance have several options. They can check with their local health department or use the search capability to contact either a free and charitable clinic or a Community Health Center.

Should I get the new vaccines now or wait until later in the season?

- If you have recently had COVID-19 or have recently been vaccinated, you should consult your health care provider on the timing.
- Everyone else should make plans to get vaccinated before the fall and winter respiratory virus season begins.
- Since the effectiveness of vaccines has waned over time, some people may want to wait until later in the fall if they want to have complete protection during the winter holiday season. Those who are at risk of severe outcomes should discuss the timing of getting their shots with their health care provider.