



NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Michael.Claffey@illinois.gov

James.Leach@illinois.gov

With Respiratory Illnesses Continuing to Circulate, IDPH Urges Illinoisans to Protect Vulnerable Family and Friends During the Holidays

Health Department Recommends Spreading Holiday Cheer, not Viruses, by Taking Basic Safety Measures & Staying Home if Sick

CHICAGO – With seasonal viruses on the uptick for the last several weeks across the state, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reminding the public to [take precautions to protect the health of friends and family](#) who are vulnerable to severe illness. The guidance comes as the CDC is reporting that a total of 48 counties are at an elevated level for COVID-19 hospital admissions according to the [CDC’s national COVID Data Tracker](#), as of the week ending December 9.

Ten counties in Illinois were listed at High level for COVID-19 hospitalizations, the same number as the previous week, meaning they recorded more than 20 COVID-19 hospitalizations per 100,000 of population in the previous week. Thirty-eight counties are at Medium level, down three from the previous week, meaning they recorded between 10 and 20 hospitalizations per 100,000 in the week. Statewide, 1,225 new COVID-19 hospitalizations were reported, down less than 1% from the previous week.

“IDPH wishes all Illinoisans a happy holiday season,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “As we celebrate this joyous time of year with our loved ones, it is important to [know your personal risk factors](#) for severe health outcomes and learn how to protect those around you, especially those most vulnerable to severe disease. COVID-19, flu, and RSV continue to circulate across Illinois, and I encourage all Illinoisans to use the many tools available to stay healthy and safe. Remember, ‘Tis the Sneezin’.”

IDPH launched a new awareness campaign this fall called [’Tis the Sneezin’](#) to remind Illinoisans that vaccinations provide the best protection against the triple threat of 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

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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 wear a mask around others so as not to spread illness.

The [updated COVID-19 shots](#) are effective against the currently dominant Covid-19 variants and are recommended for all people 6 months and older. People with egg allergy may now get any [flu vaccine](#) (egg-based or non-egg-based) that is otherwise appropriate for their age and health status and do not need to limit themselves to non-egg based shots alone. Those older than 65 years should receive any one of the higher dose or “adjuvanted” influenza shots. The [RSV shots](#) are now available for those over 60 years and pregnant people. Older adults with [risk factors for RSV](#) should talk to their provider about which shot is right for them.

To help keep the public informed about conditions around the state, IDPH recently launched an [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.

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.

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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