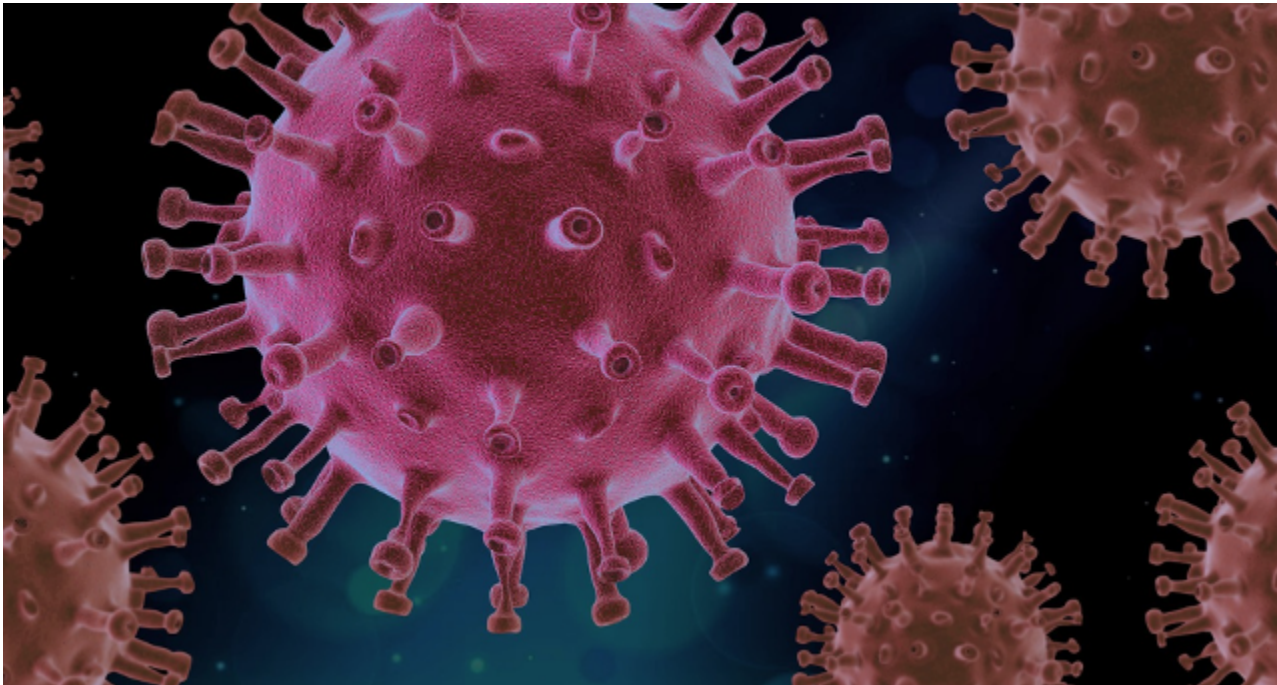


IDPH Reports that COVID-19, Other Respiratory Viruses are Mounting Across the State

by Michael Claffey

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CHICAGO – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) announced that with the holidays approaching, data indicate that the impact of respiratory viruses is being felt across the state with 44 counties now at an elevated level for COVID-19 hospitalizations, according to the [CDC's national COVID Data Tracker](#), as of the week ending November 25. COVID-19 hospitalization data indicate that 39 counties are at medium level and five are at high level, while statewide, there were 1,039 new hospitalizations reported, an increase of 20% over the previous week.

Data also show that broad acute respiratory hospitalizations are increasing across Illinois including COVID-19, flu and RSV. IDPH officials are especially concerned about pediatric ICU (PICU) capacity which is limited in many areas of the state.

Additionally, IDPH announced today that it is launching a new, weekly [Infectious Respiratory Disease Surveillance Dashboard](#) that will be updated weekly on Fridays after 3 p.m. This report will provide the public with access to the latest data on hospital visits, seasonal trends, lab test positivity and demographic data. The site will be live today (December 8) after 3 p.m.

“As we anticipated, we are seeing an increase in respiratory viruses – including COVID-19, flu and RSV - both in Illinois and across the nation,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “IDPH is closely working with our health partners to educate the public, monitor our hospital capacity, and develop effective mitigation strategies as we experience this surge. One of those strategies is our new Infectious Disease Surveillance Report, an easy to use, interactive dashboard that provides vital information to keep our residents safe.

“During this critical period with hospitalizations rising, I encourage all of our residents to use the tools available to keep yourself and your families healthy and protected,” Dr. Vohra continued. “These tools include COVID-19 testing (especially if visiting someone at risk for severe disease); enhanced ventilation; good hand hygiene; staying home and seeking treatment if sick; masking in crowded places; AND getting the COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccines for which you or your loved ones are eligible. These tools are especially critical for those most at-risk for severe disease including those who are over 65, immunocompromised, or have chronic medical conditions. And parents and caregivers: please also protect those young children given the limited pediatric ICU capacity in many areas of the state.”

Dr. Vohra also stressed that holiday hosts should 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.

IDPH is also encouraging all healthcare settings to consider masking in patient care areas especially if caring for those with weakened immune systems as both RSV and COVID-19 are rising. Per CDC recommendations, universal masking should be considered facility-wide or, based on a facility risk assessment, targeted toward higher risk areas (e.g., emergency departments, urgent care) or patient populations (e.g., when caring for patients with moderate to severe immunocompromise) during periods of higher levels of community COVID-19 or other respiratory virus transmission.

It is easy to track data by county 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.

In addition, the federal government announced that as of November 20, 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 this fall. The [Vaccines for Children Program](#) will cover vaccines for eligible children.

On September 22, CDC recommended seasonal administration of one dose of the RSV vaccine Abrysvo during weeks 32 through 36 of pregnancy, to maximize protection for babies after birth. Given limited availability of nirsevimab to protect newborns, those who are pregnant are encouraged to receive Abrysvo from now through January if they expect to deliver during RSV season. If Abrysvo was not given during the pregnancy, a baby born during RSV season should receive nirsevimab if available.

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.

Illinoisans may access the commercial supply for Lagevrio through the [Merck Patient Assistance Program](#) which will provide Lagevrio free of charge for a full year to eligible patients who could not otherwise afford it. To speak to a program representative for assistance, call 800-727-5400. The free federally funded Lagevrio supply should continue to be used for all eligible patients -including Medicare, Medicaid, uninsured and underinsured patients - until the HHS-distributed supply is depleted or reaches expiration. Some prescription discount sites are also offering coupons that could bring co-pays down significantly for a course of treatment.

For Paxlovid, the [Paxcess Patient Support Program](#) will provide free government funded supplies to those who have Medicaid/Medicare or are uninsured through a voucher system which takes five minute to enroll in. For those with commercial insurance, they will provide a \$1,500 co-pay assistance card for those who self-attest they do not have full medication coverage. This should cover the current cost of a full course of Paxlovid, with no limits on the number of times the prescription could be filled in a year, but no sooner than 90 days from the last refill, given low risk of reinfection within 90 days.

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/>.