



September 2023

Preparing for Respiratory Virus Season

Hello and happy fall to all of our community members,

Four things are synonymous with the arrival of fall; cooling temperatures, changing leaves, kids returning to school, and another respiratory virus season. This fall and winter, we can expect flu, COVID, and RSV to be circulating along with the usual colds and bugs.

As we here at Panhandle Health District are preparing for a busy respiratory season, we would like to take this opportunity to connect with you, our community partners, to share information to help protect yourselves, your staff, the children in your classrooms, and the elderly living in congregate living settings.

Flu, Covid, and RSV

Along with flu, experts have been monitoring a new COVID-19 variant that has been emerging. Cases of COVID have declined over the past year, and we are hopeful those numbers continue on that trend. With that said, other parts of the world and the U.S. are seeing a slight wave and there is a possibility that wave could grow this winter.

In addition to flu and Covid, we do expect to see cases of RSV this fall and winter. RSV, respiratory syncytial virus, is common and typically causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Unfortunately, infants and older adults can experience a more severe illness and may need to be hospitalized. According to the CDC, each year, approximately 60,000-160,000 older adults in the U.S. are hospitalized due to RSV and 6,000-10,000 die of the infection.

The following are steps you can take to help stop the spread and severity of Influenza, RSV and Covid.



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schools and general office settings

Education:

- Share information about respiratory symptoms, spread, and prevention.
- Display informative signage regarding symptoms of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, and monitoring procedures.
- Encourage those who are ill to stay home.
- Those with Covid symptoms should be tested. If a Covid test is positive, follow the latest CDC isolation guidelines. (Tests are covered by most insurance and are available at any pharmacy. Contact PHD if you need a covid test, and one will be provided at no cost to you).
- Stay up-to-date on current viral activity by monitoring Wastewater data at [Verily Public Health](#).
- Inform staff and parents about respiratory outbreaks within the facility and ways to stay healthy.

Hygiene & Sanitation:

- Ensure regular handwashing and availability of alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Frequently disinfect touchpoints like doorknobs and light switches.
- Sinks should be stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Promote proper covering nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing (into your sleeve, not your hands).
- Provide masks to those who need or request them.

Stock & Supplies:

- Ensure ready access to tissues, hand sanitizers, masks, sanitizing surface wipes and other essentials, and teach the proper way to use them.

Vaccination:

- Familiarize yourself with seasonal vaccines. (See section below with up-to-date vaccine information)
- Encourage staff and students to visit with their physician to determine if they should be vaccinated.



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congregate living settings

long term care, assisted & independent living facilities, jails, group settings, etc.

Nursing homes face a unique challenge with respiratory pathogens such as Influenza, RSV, and COVID-19. Due to close quarters and the vulnerability of residents, it's paramount we take every step to safeguard their health.



Education:

- Share information about respiratory symptoms, spread, and prevention.
- Educate Staff on proper donning and doffing of appropriate PPE.
- Display informative signage regarding symptoms of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, and monitoring procedures.
- Encourage staff who are ill to stay home.
- Those with Covid symptoms should be tested. If a Covid test is positive, follow the latest CDC isolation guidelines.
- Stay up-to-date on current area viral activity by monitoring Wastewater data at [Verily Public Health](#)



Hygiene & Sanitation:

- Ensure regular handwashing and availability of alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Frequently disinfect touchpoints like doorknobs and light switches.
- Sinks should be stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Promote proper covering nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing (into your sleeve, not your hands).
- Provide masks to those who need or request them.



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congregate living settings, cont.

Stock & Supplies:

- Ensure ready access to tissues, hand sanitizers, masks, sanitizing surface wipes and other essentials, and teach the proper way to use them.
- Track PPE usage and ensure sufficient stock, especially during outbreaks.
- Use resources like the CDC's burn rate calculator for stock predictions. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/pandemic/ppe.html>
- The local public health department can assist with masks and covid tests in an emergency; however, facilities should ensure they are prepared by having adequate PPE and test kits available using the burn rate calculator.



Vaccination:

- Familiarize yourself with seasonal vaccines. (See section below with up-to-date vaccine information)
- Offer annual flu, COVID, and RSV vaccinations
- Maintain a record of vaccination status.



Visitor Guidelines:

- Screen visitors for respiratory symptoms.
- Encourage virtual meetings when possible.
- Provide masks to those exhibiting respiratory symptoms.

Isolation:

- Provide Covid tests to residents and staff as needed.
- Provide masks for positive patients and isolate symptomatic/positive residents.
- Train staff on how to cohort and care for residents with respiratory infections and proper PPE usage.



Monitoring & Reporting:

- Continuously watch for symptoms in residents and staff.
- Inform all stakeholders (staff, family, visitors) about respiratory outbreaks within the facility.
- Report any/all positive cases to Panhandle Health District within 24 hours.

Phone: 208-415-5225

Fax: 208-772-3920



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congregate living settings, cont.

Plan & Communicate:

- Have a clear strategy for infection control and education regarding respiratory illnesses.
- Ensure policies are current with the latest guidelines.
- Develop plans and educational material to include signs and symptoms of respiratory illness, including COVID-19, and how to monitor residents for signs and symptoms of respiratory illness.
- Develop robust infection control policies that outline the recommended transmission-based precautions that should be used when caring for residents with respiratory infections.
- Display proper signage outside rooms indicating precautions and required PPE.
<https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/basics/transmission-based-precautions.html>
- The facility should have a plan in place for protecting residents, healthcare personnel, and visitors from respiratory infections, including COVID-19, RSV, and influenza.
- The facility instructs personnel (including consultant personnel) to regularly monitor themselves for fever and symptoms of respiratory infection, as a part of routine practice.
- The facility should have a method for communication to inform staff, family members, visitors, and other persons coming into the facility (e.g., consultants, sales, and delivery people) about the status of COVID-19 or other respiratory outbreaks in the facility.



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covid isolation guidelines: when to isolate

Regardless of vaccination status, you should isolate from others when you have COVID-19. You should also isolate if you are sick and suspect that you have COVID-19 but do not yet have test results. If your results are positive, follow the full isolation recommendations below. If your results are negative, you can end your isolation. (Testing too early may result in false negative results)

**IF YOU TEST
Negative**
You can end your
isolation

**IF YOU TEST
Positive**
Follow the full isolation
recommendations below

When you have COVID-19, isolation is counted in days, as follows:

If you had no symptoms

- Day 0 is the day you were tested (not the day you received your positive test result)
- Day 1 is the first full day following the day you were tested
- If you develop symptoms within 10 days of when you were tested, the clock restarts at day 0 on the day of symptom onset

If you had symptoms

- Day 0 of isolation is the day of symptom onset, regardless of when you tested positive
- Day 1 is the first full day after the day your symptoms started

If you test positive for COVID-19, stay home for at least 5 days and isolate from others in your home.

You are likely most infectious during these first 5 days.

- Wear a high-quality mask if you must be around others at home and in public.
- Do not go places where you are unable to wear a mask. For travel guidance, see CDC's Travel webpage.
- Do not travel.
- Stay home and separate from others as much as possible.
- Use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- Take steps to improve ventilation at home, if possible.
- Don't share personal household items, like cups, towels, and utensils.
- Monitor your symptoms. If you have an emergency warning sign (like trouble breathing), seek emergency medical care immediately.
- Learn more about what to do if you have COVID-19.



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covid isolation guidelines: ending isolation

If you had no symptoms

You may end isolation after day 5.

If you had symptoms and: Your symptoms are improving

You may end isolation after day 5 if:

- You are fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication).



If you had symptoms and your symptoms are not improving

Continue to isolate until:

- You are fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication).
- Your symptoms are improving.

If you had symptoms and had Moderate illness (you experienced shortness of breath or had difficulty breathing)

You need to isolate through day 10.

Severe illness (you were hospitalized) or have a weakened immune system

- You need to isolate through day 10.
- Consult your doctor before ending isolation.
- Ending isolation without a viral test may not be an option for you.

Regardless of when you end isolation

Until at least day 11:

- Avoid being around people who are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19.
- Remember to wear a high-quality mask when indoors around others at home and in public.
- Do not go places where you are unable to wear a mask until you are able to discontinue masking (see below).
- For travel guidance, see CDC's [Travel webpage](#).



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covid isolation guidelines: removing your mask

After you have ended isolation, when you are feeling better (no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and symptoms improving),

- Wear your mask through day 10.

OR

- If you have access to antigen tests, you should consider using them. With two sequential negative tests 48 hours apart, you may remove your mask sooner than day 10.

Note: If your antigen test results are positive, you may still be infectious. You should continue wearing a mask and wait at least 48 hours before taking another test. Continue taking antigen tests at least 48 hours apart until you have two sequential negative results. This may mean you need to continue wearing a mask and testing beyond day 10.



This Isolation information is from CDC.gov

For Current up-to-date CDC guidelines visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html>



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Vaccine Information

Flu Vaccine: Each year, the flu vaccine is updated to match the circulating flu viruses. Typically flu vaccines protect against the three or four viruses that research suggests will be most common for that flu season. Since flu viruses are constantly changing, the vaccine is updated to provide the best protection. The best time to receive your flu vaccine is late September or October. Everyone 6 months and older is recommended to receive a flu vaccine annually. There are higher dose flu vaccines available for those 65 and older, or with an order by a physician for those needing a higher dose flu vaccine. It is important to note, you do not want to get your flu vaccine too early because protection may wane before the end of flu season.

Covid Vaccine: An updated COVID-19 vaccine is expected to be released this fall. It will provide better protection against the latest variants. Vaccines that protect against earlier strains of the virus are still available. A patient should consult their physician to decide if they should get a booster or wait for the new vaccine. There may be instances where a patient has upcoming travel plans, or who may be at high risk for serious illness or in contact with high-risk individuals who may wish to protect themselves now.

- Getting a COVID-19 vaccine after you recover from COVID-19 infection provides added protection against COVID-19. Wait 3 months from when your symptoms started, or you received a positive test to get your vaccine.
- Over 65 or at risk for severe disease: Visit with your provider to determine timing and frequency for boosters following COVID infection.

RSV Vaccine: RSV, respiratory syncytial virus, is common and typically causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Unfortunately, infants and older adults can experience a more severe illness and may need to be hospitalized. This year, an RSV vaccine is available for adults aged 60 or older. Patients should speak to their healthcare provider about whether the RSV vaccine is right for them.

**Medicare Part D covers the RSV vaccine, but some private health insurance plans don't and it could be costly to patients not covered by Insurance.*



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contact us

**Panhandle Health District is
here to support you this
respiratory virus season!**

If you have any questions or
need further information or
guidance, a staff epidemiologist
would be happy to help.

**Epidemiologist Line:
208-415-5225**



**Panhandle Health District offers vaccine appointments in
all five counties in the Panhandle.**

**To book an appointment, call or text
208-415-5270.**



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*together, we can stay healthy this
respiratory virus season!*