

CDC Updates and Simplifies Respiratory Virus Recommendations

Recommendations are easier to follow and help protect those most at risk.

March 1, 2024 By Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released today [updated recommendations](#) for how people can protect themselves and their communities from respiratory viruses, including COVID-19. The new guidance brings a unified approach to addressing risks from a range of common respiratory viral illnesses, such as COVID-19, flu, and RSV, which can cause significant health impacts and strain on hospitals and health care workers. CDC is making updates to the recommendations now because the U.S. is seeing far fewer hospitalizations and deaths associated with COVID-19 and because we have more tools than ever to combat flu, COVID, and RSV.

“Today’s announcement reflects the progress we have made in protecting against severe illness from COVID-19,” said CDC director Dr. Mandy Cohen. “However, we still must use the commonsense solutions we know work to protect ourselves and others from serious illness from respiratory viruses—this includes vaccination, treatment, and staying home when we get sick.”

As part of the guidance, CDC provides active recommendations on core prevention steps and strategies:

- Staying [up to date with vaccination](#) to protect people against serious illness, hospitalization, and death. This includes flu, COVID-19, and RSV if eligible.
- 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.

When people get sick with a respiratory virus, the updated guidance recommends that they stay home and away from others. For people with COVID-19 and influenza, treatment is available and can lessen symptoms and lower the risk of severe illness. The recommendations suggest returning

to normal activities when, for at least 24 hours, symptoms are improving overall, and if a fever was present, it has been gone without use of a fever-reducing medication.

Once people resume normal activities, they are encouraged to take additional prevention strategies for the next 5 days to curb disease spread, such as taking more steps for cleaner air, enhancing hygiene practices, wearing a well-fitting mask, keeping a distance from others, and/or getting tested for respiratory viruses. Enhanced precautions are especially important to protect those most at risk for severe illness, including those over 65 and people with weakened immune systems.

CDC's updated guidance reflects how the [circumstances](#) around [COVID-19 in particular have changed](#). While it remains a threat, today it is far less likely to cause severe illness because of widespread immunity and improved tools to prevent and treat the disease. Importantly, states and countries that have already adjusted recommended isolation times have not seen increased hospitalizations or deaths related to COVID-19.

While every respiratory virus does not act the same, adopting a unified approach to limiting disease spread makes recommendations easier to follow and thus more likely to be adopted and does not rely on individuals to test for illness, a practice that data indicates is uneven.

"The bottom line is that when people follow these actionable recommendations to avoid getting sick, and to protect themselves and others if they do get sick, it will help limit the spread of respiratory viruses, and that will mean fewer people who experience severe illness," National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases director Dr. Demetre Daskalakis said. "That includes taking enhanced precautions that can help protect people who are at higher risk for getting seriously ill."

The updated guidance also includes specific sections with additional considerations for people who are at higher risk of severe illness from respiratory viruses, including people who are immunocompromised, people with disabilities, people who are or were recently pregnant, young children, and older adults. Respiratory viruses remain a public health threat. CDC will continue to focus efforts on ensuring the public has the information and tools to lower their risk of respiratory illness by protecting themselves, families, and communities.

This updated guidance is intended for community settings. There are no changes to respiratory virus guidance for healthcare settings.

This [news release](#) was published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on March 1, 2024.