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CORONAVIRUS

As COVID numbers rise, public health officials call for vigilance against respiratory viruses

By Ilana Arougheti
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Commuters, some wearing face masks to protect against COVID-19, board a CTA Brown line train in Chicago,

June 30, 2022 (Antonio Perez/Chicago Tribune)

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With COVID-19 hospitalization back on the rise in Illinois, state public health officials are asking residents to double down on protecting themselves against seasonal illness.

Twenty Illinois counties are now at a medium level for hospitalization related to COVID-19, with a 17% increase in hospital COVID-19 cases since last week. Flu and RSV infections are also rising in hospitals, according to a news release from the Illinois Department of Public Health.

During Thanksgiving, staying healthy means washing hands often during the holiday, keeping rooms ventilated and asking guests to cover coughs, IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra said in the release.

“I want to encourage our residents to use all of the tools at their disposal to protect themselves and their loved ones this Thanksgiving holiday weekend,” Vohra said.

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IDPH also asks residents to skip holiday gatherings if they have symptoms of respiratory infections, Vohra said. Residents can sign up [online](#) for four free COVID-19 tests, masks and other free personal protective equipment.

The department is also calling on health care centers to enforce masking policies this holiday season.

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Omicron strains of COVID-19 are currently the most common, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data. The CDC also reports a nationwide rise in RSV, with low vaccine rates but high hospitalization rates among children and older adults.

The CDC operates a free COVID-19 vaccine program for people without insurance. Children and teens under 19 can receive [other free vaccines](#) if they are uninsured, or if they are Indigenous or Native Alaskan.

However, with current shortages of RSV vaccines for children, pregnant people should seek a vaccine between 32 and 36 weeks to pass along antibodies, according to IDPH.

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