



Health Alert



City of Chicago
Lori E. Lightfoot, Mayor

www.chicagohan.org

Chicago Department of Public Health
Allison Arwady MD MPH, Commissioner

Pediatric Respiratory Illness Update for Youth Settings November 1, 2022

KEY MESSAGES

- The Chicagoland area has seen an early surge of respiratory illness in children that is impacting the availability of pediatric hospital beds.
- While the COVID-19 community level in Chicago is currently LOW, respiratory illness typically peaks from November through April.
- Staying up to date on vaccination continues to be the best way to protect children from severe outcomes from both influenza and COVID-19. Influenza vaccine may be administered on the same day as the COVID-19 vaccine.
- The Omicron-specific booster has been approved under EUA and is available for everyone 5 and older who has received their first COVID-19 vaccine series.
- Families should be reminded to keep their children home when sick, even if their illness is not caused by COVID-19, to practice good hand hygiene, and to mask when experiencing mild, cold-like symptoms.

An early increase in respiratory viruses has caused pediatric hospitals to become overwhelmed, with only 6% bed availability in the state of Illinois, as of October 28. This is especially concerning as Chicago is currently in [low community transmission for COVID-19](#), and as [influenza season has not started yet](#). The current trends serve as a reminder that even if an illness is not due to COVID-19, it can have a significant impact on our healthcare system. Schools are encouraged to revisit common strategies to reduce the burden of respiratory illness in our school communities.

Respiratory Hygiene

As we enter cold and flu season, schools should reinforce respiratory hygiene amongst students and staff:

1. Teach students and staff to cover their mouth when they cough or sneeze, using a tissue or their bent arm, not their hands.
2. Wash hands frequently throughout the day, using soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and making sure to clean all surfaces. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can kill many common respiratory viruses and may be used when soap and water are not readily available and hands are not visibly dirty.
3. Prevent sharing of cups or utensils, as well as anything that goes in the mouth.
4. Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, desks, sporting equipment, and toys routinely.

School Exclusion

While some respiratory diseases that are not vaccine-preventable, such as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), can cause mild symptoms in school-aged children, they can cause serious illness in children younger than 5. Schools should:

1. Separate sick students and staff from others until they can be picked up to go home.
2. Exclude students and staff who are sick until they are fever-free for a minimum of 24 hours without fever-reducing medications, even if they have tested negative for COVID-19.

3. Encourage parents to keep children at home if they have no fever but copious nasal discharge; if staying home is not an option, strongly encourage masking.

Vaccination

An important way to protect the healthcare system is to recommend that your school community stays up-to-date on their vaccinations.

Staff and students 6 months and older should receive the flu vaccine each fall as soon as it is available, preferably before Halloween.

As of October 12, 2022, the [CDC has expanded the recommended use of updated \(bivalent\) COVID-19 boosters](#) to include children 5 years of age and older. This followed the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s emergency use authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech updated COVID-19 booster for children ages 5 through 11 years, and the Moderna updated COVID-19 booster for children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years. Students and staff are able to receive the updated booster, which offers protection against the original COVID-19 strain and the Omicron variant, at least two months after completing their primary series or their last monovalent booster dose, whichever is later.

To find a flu or COVID vaccine for you or your school community, visit [vaccines.gov](#). CDPH also hosts [free COVID and flu immunization clinics](#) throughout the fall.

Resources

Influenza One Pager and parent letter:

https://www.chicagohan.org/en/web/han/school_health/communicable-diseases-in-schools/flu-in-schools

RSV One Pager and parent letter:

https://www.chicagohan.org/school_health/communicable-diseases-in-schools/rsv-in-schools

Common cold One Pager and parent letter:

https://www.chicagohan.org/school_health/communicable-diseases-in-schools/common-cold-in-schools

COVID-19 One Pager and parent letters:

https://www.chicagohan.org/school_health/communicable-diseases-in-schools/covid-in-schools

Please see attached School Community Template Letter Attached to the end of this HAN.

References

1. [IDPH PICU Bed Availability: Health Alert](#)
2. [Chicago COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#)
3. [IDPH Webportal: Respiratory Syncytial Virus](#)
4. [CDPH School HAN: Respiratory Syncytial Virus](#)
5. [American Academy of Pediatrics: Oct 2022](#)
6. [CDPH: CDC Updates on COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility](#)



preventative actions

- **Washing your hands often**
- **Covering your coughs and sneezes**
- **If your child is sick, keep them home**

- **Maximizing indoor ventilation and air circulation**

- **Wearing a mask**
- **Wearing a mask**

Vaccination

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- **Colleges of Chicago** **family vaccination clinics at City**

- **vaccination clinics** **flu and COVID-19**

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