



Date: December 19, 2022

Time: 4:00 pm

ECHD Office of Epidemiology and Surveillance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health Alert

Urgent Need to Increase Immunization Coverage for Influenza, COVID-19, and RSV during the 2023-2024 Winter Season.

Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is alerting healthcare providers to currently low vaccination rates against influenza, COVID-19, and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). Low vaccination rates, coupled with ongoing increases in respiratory disease activity caused by multiple pathogens, could lead to more severe disease and increased healthcare capacity strain in the coming weeks.

In the past 4 weeks, hospitalizations among all age groups increased by 200% for influenza, 51% for COVID-19, and 60% for RSV. As of December 1, 2023, the weekly percentages of pediatric emergency department visits for pneumonia due to multiple etiologies were increasing since September. To date, 12 pediatric influenza deaths have been reported during the 2023-2024 season. Infants and older adults remain at highest risk of severe disease. Vaccination for influenza, COVID-19 and RSV reduces the risk of severe disease, including pneumonia, hospitalizations, and death.

Vaccination Rates

COVID-19 Vaccination: Vaccination coverage for the updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine remains low. As of December 2, 2023, the percent of the population reporting receipt of this vaccine was 7.7% in children 6 months- 17 years (including 2.8% in children 6 months- 4 years), 17.2% in adults >18 years (including 36% in adults >65 years) and 9.6% in pregnant persons.

RSV Vaccination: As of December 2, 2023, 15.9% of U.S. adults aged > 60 years reported receiving an RSV vaccine.

Influenza Vaccination: Vaccination coverage for the seasonal 2023-2024 influenza vaccine is low in all age groups compared with the same period of the 2022-2023 season (Table 1). As of November 18, 2023, there were 7.4 million fewer influenza vaccine doses administered to adults in pharmacies and physician offices compared with the 2022-2023 influenza season.



Table 1. Influenza Vaccination Coverage Estimates, United States

Population	2022-2023	2023-2024
Age 6 months-17 years (as of November 11)	39.1%	35.9%
Age ≥18 years (as of November 11)	38.4%	36.1%
Age ≥65 years (as of November 11)	61.3%	58.6%
Pregnant people (as of December 2)	36.0%	33.6%

Recommendations for Healthcare Providers

Healthcare providers should administer influenza, COVID-19, and RSV immunizations now to patients. Immunizations can prevent hospitalization and death associated with these respiratory diseases. It is important to focus immunizations for people at increased risk for severe disease including infants, older adults, pregnant people, and people with certain underlying medical conditions.

1. Providers should leverage all available tools to increase immunizations against influenza, COVID-19, and RSV.
2. Healthcare providers should administer influenza, COVID-19, and RSV immunizations now to all patients.
 - a. Everyone 6 months and older should receive a 2023-2024 seasonal influenza vaccine. Adults ages 65 years and older should receive high-dose, adjuvanted, or recombinant influenza vaccine.
 - b. Everyone 6 months and older should receive at least one dose of an updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine.
 - c. Adults 60 years and older may receive one dose of RSV vaccine using shared clinical decision-making.
 - d. There are two options to protect infants against RSV-associated lower respiratory tract disease: RSV vaccine for pregnant people and for infants.
3. Providers are encouraged to report cases of MIS-C (Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome-COVID-19) to their jurisdictional health department.
4. Antiviral medications are currently underutilized but are important to treat patients, especially persons at high-risk of progression to severe disease with influenza or COVID-19, including older adults and people with certain underlying medical conditions.
5. Healthcare providers should counsel patients about other everyday preventative actions they can do to protect themselves against respiratory diseases including testing, covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands wearing a well-fitting mask if a patient chooses to wear a mask, and improving ventilation in home and work environments.

Recommendations for the Public



1. Talk to your healthcare provider about immunizations recommended for you and your household or family members, including children.
2. If you develop symptoms of a respiratory illness, talk to your healthcare provider about testing and treatment options.
3. Be aware of everyday prevention measures including covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands, staying home when sick, wearing a well-fitting mask if you choose to wear a mask, and improving airflow at home or at work.

Free Covid-19 rapid home test kits are available at the Erie County Health Department/Erie County Community Health Center for community members Monday-Friday, 8am-4:30pm excluding holidays. Influenza, RSV and Covid vaccinations are available at the Erie County Health Department / Community Health Center. Call Central Scheduling at 567-867-5174 to make an appointment. Individuals in need of a primary care provider may contact the Erie County Community Health Center at 567-867-5174. Visit [COVID-19 – Erie County Health Department \(eriecohealthohio.com\)](https://eriecohealthohio.com) for more information on respiratory trends and resources in Erie County. Contact Taylor Kula, Epidemiologist, at 419-626-5623 x 5103 for questions pertaining to COVID-19 testing, vaccination and trends.

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