



Chaffee County Public Health

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January 10, 2025

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Significant Increase in Respiratory Illnesses Across Colorado and the United States

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting a substantial rise in respiratory illnesses, notably influenza (flu) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Increasing respiratory illnesses are affecting both Colorado and the broader United States, and rates of illness may continue to increase over the upcoming weeks. The CDC monitors respiratory illness activity using the "acute respiratory illness" metric, which currently categorizes Colorado at a high level.

National and State Overview:

- **Influenza:** Flu activity has escalated nationwide, with the most recent data showing approximately 18.7% of tested specimens returning positive for flu, predominantly influenza A. The CDC estimates at least 5.3 million flu cases, 63,000 hospitalizations, and 2,700 deaths, including 11 pediatric fatalities, so far this season. In Colorado, hospital admissions for flu have been increasing substantially since mid-December, though may be plateauing in recent days.
- **RSV:** RSV cases are increasing, particularly impacting young children and older adults over 75. Nationally, the rates of test positivity for RSV have increased from 7.1% to 12.8%. In Colorado, hospital admissions for RSV have also been increasing substantially since mid-December.
- **COVID:** COVID levels do not follow the same patterns as those of influenza and RSV. COVID levels tend to spike at a variety of times throughout the year. Currently in Colorado, COVID levels are elevated, and while they are not following the sharp rise like flu or RSV, COVID continues to circulate significantly in the community.

Chaffee County Specifics:

In Chaffee County, Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center (HRRMC) reports that since November they have had 4 hospitalized RSV, 3 hospitalized influenza and 6 hospitalized COVID. HRRMC encourages patients and visitors who are at risk for severe disease to wear a mask while in their facility.

Chaffee County Public Health's Vision: *All people in Chaffee County have opportunities to achieve healthy and connected lives in a community that embraces every aspect of health and well-being.*



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Preventive Measures:

Chaffee County Public Health (CCPH) strongly recommends the following actions to mitigate the spread of these viruses:

- **Vaccination:** Annual flu and COVID vaccinations are advised for everyone over six months old. Additionally, RSV vaccinations are recommended for older adults and high-risk individuals, including pregnant women and newborns. In Chaffee County, only 28.3% of eligible individuals have received a flu vaccine, 17.9% of those eligible have received a COVID vaccine and 19.5% of those eligible have received an RSV vaccine. Even though the respiratory illness season has already started, it is not too late to get vaccinated.
- **Hygiene Practices:** Regular handwashing, avoiding touching the face, coughing and sneezing into your elbow and staying away from sick individuals are crucial preventive steps.
- **Staying Home When Sick:** All individuals who are acutely sick with any virus, whether they've tested positive or not, are encouraged to stay home when sick, or if they have to be around others to wear a mask. In general, all individuals should stay home until they are fever free for 24 hours and their symptoms are markedly improved.

Testing and Treatment:

For some high risk individuals, treatment for respiratory illnesses with an antiviral medication, such as Paxlovid or Tamiflu, may be recommended. Local clinics and pharmacies have the ability to test and offer treatment for flu and COVID, as well as offer vaccinations for flu, COVID, and RSV. RSV is not treated with an antiviral, but rather with medications to reduce symptoms. If you are a high risk and are concerned you have one of these illnesses, please consider talking with your doctor about testing and treatment or calling a local pharmacy to ask about testing and treatment. For both COVID and flu, getting started on medication quickly is important.

“For many people, getting RSV, flu or COVID is uncomfortable and inconvenient. However, for many other high risk individuals, these illnesses can be dangerous. As we head into the next month, where we likely will see our largest spikes of flu and RSV, we ask that all people respect the vulnerable individuals in our community by staying away from others when they are sick. If you do become sick and are at high risk, it's important to take your illness seriously, and contact your healthcare provider if your symptoms become concerning,” says **Emily Anderson**, Deputy Director, CCPH.

Chaffee County Public Health, HRRMC and others continue to monitor the situation closely and will provide updates to the public as necessary. For questions, please contact CCPH at 719-539-4510. For up-to-date Colorado respiratory illness rates, visit:
<https://cdphe.colorado.gov/viral-respiratory-diseases-report>

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