



## Public Health Brief

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## COVID and Flu Update

With our clocks springing ahead tomorrow night, and the daytime temps heading for the 50's and 60's spring is on the horizon. With it comes good news about COVID and flu, and some changes.

Evidence points to the fact that **the worst of the respiratory virus season appears to be behind us**. See:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Respiratory-Viruses/RespiratoryDashboard.aspx>

Both the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have changed their **recommendations for isolation following an infection**. They are very similar, recommending:

- staying home for 24 hours after you are free of fever and have stopped fever reducing medication, and
- your symptoms are improving.

We agree, and with them, also recommend masking for 5-10 days from illness onset when you are around other persons, especially those who might be at high risk for complications from a respiratory infection. Note that this applies to all respiratory infections, and not just those with a positive test for COVID.

See the following commentary from the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security on these controversial recommendations:

As anticipated, and for the first time since 2021, the US CDC last week [released new guidance](#) on respiratory illness isolation, bringing what the agency called "[a unified, practical approach](#)" to addressing the risks from respiratory viruses such as those that cause COVID-



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19 and flu. The recommendations involve a [2-phase approach](#), with the first phase emphasizing staying home until at least 24 hours after fever resolves without fever-reducing medication **and** other symptoms—such as fatigue, cough, runny nose, and headache—begin to improve. The second phase involves returning to normal activities but with [added precautions over the next 5 days](#), such as mask wearing, physical distancing, improving ventilation, or testing before being around others indoors.

Many experts welcomed this shift, citing increased immunity against SARS-CoV-2 in the population due to either infection or vaccination and the availability of effective vaccines and treatments. They argue that this adjustment is [practical, evidence-based](#), and [aligned with long-standing recommendations](#) for respiratory illnesses. However, others believe it is premature to treat COVID-19 like the flu, citing differences such as post-COVID conditions and the need for ongoing prevention strategies tailored to each virus. Despite similarities to other respiratory viruses, [COVID-19 is not yet considered a seasonal illness](#) and the virus continues to [pose unique risks and considerations](#) that warrant cautious management, especially for older adults and people with compromised immune systems. A community of long COVID patients and advocates are [planning a march in Washington, DC, on March 15 to protest the latest CDC guidance](#) and raise awareness about preventing, researching, and treating long COVID.

Today, March 8, 2024, is the last day our free **Paxlovid** can be dispensed. However, if you are at high risk for a serious outcome from a COVID infection, we will still provide screening for you. We are available 7 days a week by calling 530-694-2146, Option 1, and your message will be answered within 24 hours. If you are eligible, you would need to contact your pharmacy to make sure they have it available, and we can call it in for you. Remember that it is effective at preventing hospitalization when used in the first few days of illness. Which means you have been exposed or have tested positive.

**Free COVID-19 tests** are still available by mail, but the U.S. Postal Service says orders will be suspended after today. Since Nov. 20, residents have been eligible to receive up to two orders of four at-home COVID-19 tests via the USPS, meaning each home could receive up to eight tests. The offer is ending just as COVID-19 restrictions and recommendations from health officials have been significantly relaxed, but testing continues to be a central part of the recommendations made by state and federal officials. The good news: Alpine County Public Health has an ample supply of FREE at-home test kits. You may come in and obtain kits at the Health Department in Woodfords (M-F, 8-12 and 1-5), or at the Public Safety Office in Bear Valley.

Individuals aged 65 and older in the US [should receive an additional dose](#) of the updated 2023–2024 **COVID-19 vaccine**. Older adults can get an extra dose [at least 4 months after](#) their previous vaccination, while people with conditions that compromise their immune systems can get another dose at least 2 months after the last dose. The CDC recommendation means insurance companies should cover a second shot for those who are eligible and have coverage.

The recommendation’s language—which uses “should”—differs from CDC guidance that last year said older adults “may” get a spring booster. The change was made to [make clearer](#)—to those in the age group as well as to doctors and pharmacists who can offer the shots—that getting another dose will reduce the risk of severe disease or death from COVID-19. Data show that [older adults face higher risks](#) of severe COVID-19 outcomes, and those aged 75 and older are most likely to die of COVID-19. A spring shot likely will be [most beneficial](#) to those who never got a fall dose, those who have chronic health conditions like heart disease, and people living in long-term care facilities or other



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close living arrangements. Updated COVID-19 [vaccines for the 2024–2025 winter season](#) may be available later this year.

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Respiratory-Viruses/RespiratoryDashboard.aspx>

<https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/respiratory-virus-guidance.html>



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