



## Public Health Brief

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## Vaccines for the “Tripledemic”: Who, When, and Where?

### RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)

RSV is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in a week or two, but RSV can be serious. Infants and older adults are more likely to develop severe RSV and need hospitalization. Outbreaks occur every winter throughout the US.

RSV infections can be dangerous for certain adults. Each year, it is estimated that between 60,000-160,000 older adults in the United States are hospitalized and 6,000-10,000 die due to RSV infection. Adults at highest risk for severe RSV infection include:

- Older adults
- Adults with chronic heart or lung disease
- Adults with weakened immune systems
- Adults with certain other underlying medical conditions
- Adults living in nursing homes or long-term care facilities

RSV can be dangerous for infants and young children. It is the leading cause of infant hospitalization in the US, with an estimated 58,000-80,000 children younger than 5 years hospitalized due to RSV associated pneumonia or bronchiolitis. Children at greatest risk for severe illness from RSV include the following:

- Premature infants
- Infants up to 12 months, especially those 6 months and younger
- Children younger than 2 years with chronic lung disease or congenital (present from birth) heart disease
- Children with weakened immune systems
- Children who have neuromuscular disorders, including those who have difficulty swallowing or clearing mucus secretions

**ACTION: RSV vaccine is NOW available at local pharmacies (single shot), for persons >60 years of age, and for pregnant females at 32-36 weeks gestation (to protect their newborns). Monoclonal antibody products are available for infants and young children – check with your healthcare provider.**



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## **Influenza (seasonal flu)**

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. From 2010 – 2020, annually there were 12,000-52,000 deaths, 140,000-710,000 hospitalizations, and 9-41 million recorded illnesses. Last year was considered a “moderate” year, with >19,000 deaths, >300,000 hospitalizations, and >27 million illnesses. There were 168 laboratory-confirmed deaths in children. Almost 10% of children will get infected each year.

Getting an annual flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from flu. If you are at higher risk of developing serious flu complications, flu vaccination is especially important. When you get vaccinated, you reduce your risk of getting sick with flu and possibly being hospitalized or dying from flu, and you help to protect those around you who might be more vulnerable to complications.

**Following is a list of all the health and age factors that are known to increase a person’s risk of getting serious flu complications:**

- Adults 65 years and older
- Children younger than 2 years old<sup>1</sup>
- Asthma
- Neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions
- Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
- Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
- Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
- Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
- Kidney diseases
- Liver disorders
- Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- People who are obese with a body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher
- People younger than 19 years old on long-term aspirin- or salicylate-containing medications.
- People with a weakened immune system due to disease (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or some cancers such as leukemia) or medications (such as those receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatment for cancer, or persons with chronic conditions requiring chronic corticosteroids or other drugs that suppress the immune system)
- People who have had a stroke

**Other people at higher risk from flu:**

- Pregnant people and people up to 2 weeks after the end of pregnancy
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People from certain racial and ethnic minority groups are at increased risk for hospitalization with flu, including non-Hispanic Black persons, Hispanic or Latino persons, and American Indian or Alaska Native persons



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- Although all children younger than 5 years old are considered at higher risk of serious flu complications, the highest risk is for those younger than 2 years old, with the highest hospitalization and death rates among infants younger than 6 months old.

The Alpine County Health Department Clinic has rapid tests available for use during a clinic visit. Please call 530-694-2146, Option 2 to make an appointment. A single home test for flu and COVID has recently been approved for persons >2 years of age and may be available at your local pharmacy. The estimated cost ranges from \$35-68 for a single use test which takes 30 minutes for results.

**ACTION: We expect to offer flu vaccine to anyone >6 months of age through the Health Department free of charge during the month of October. We advise you NOT to get a flu shot yet, as getting a shot too early allows your protection to possibly wear off before the end of the flu season. We also expect to have the high dose flu vaccine for seniors >65 years of age, billed to Medicare. Our usual drive-through event will be scheduled in Woodfords as soon as we receive our shipment of vaccine, followed by events in Bear Valley, Kirkwood, and Diamond Valley Elementary School. Stay tuned!**

## **COVID-19**

COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) is a disease caused by a virus named SARS-CoV-2. It can be very contagious and spreads quickly. Over one million people have died from COVID-19 in the United States. COVID-19 most often causes respiratory symptoms that can feel much like a cold, the flu, or pneumonia. COVID-19 may attack more than your lungs and respiratory system. Other parts of your body may also be affected by the disease. Most people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms, but some people become severely ill. Some people including those with minor or no symptoms will develop Post-COVID Conditions – also called “Long COVID.”

Last week your Alpine County Health Department staff were dealing with new cases in Alpine County almost every day. The most recent statistics for California show total hospital admissions up 18.8% compared to the previous week, and COVID deaths up 17.6%. After months of low case rates and hospitalizations, it appears that a summer surge began during the month of July. However, deaths are still at their lowest point since the pandemic began, but still at >400 per week in the US.

Some of the rise is due to new variants, specifically the EG.5 (ERIS), and more recently, the appearance of BA.2.86 (Pirola). The BA.2.86 variant has 34 mutations, which is a concern. However, not much is known yet about how fast it spreads, whether or not it causes serious illness, and whether or not it can evade protections from previous infection, vaccines, or treatment.

Illness typically includes upper respiratory or allergy symptoms, with increased chance of conjunctivitis (red eyes), and less chance of loss of taste and smell than previous variants. Some people go on to develop pneumonia, although most people feel miserable for 2-3 days before recovering. Isolation is recommended for at least 5 days from onset of first symptoms.



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The good news – We are now in a position to prevent nearly every potential COVID death:

- It is estimated that 96-97% of persons have some immunity from previous infection or vaccination.
- At-home rapid tests are still available FREE for the asking through our Health Department in both Woodfords and at the Public Safety office in Bear Valley.
- The next COVID vaccine is expected to be released as soon as mid-September. Unlike previous COVID vaccine campaigns, free vaccine will no longer be available, except for a very small number of persons who are uninsured or underinsured. Please call us if you might fit in that category. Vaccine will be available at participating pharmacies, and coverage will be determined by your insurance company. Persons at high risk include those who are older, immunocompromised, or with chronic medical conditions – see: [Factors That Affect Your Risk of Getting Very Sick from COVID-19 | CDC](#)
- The strongest weapon in our toolbox is the medication Paxlovid. This first line treatment is available FREE from our Health Department, by calling me at 530-694-2146, Option 1. Leave your message and I will get back to you within 24 hours. It will shorten the course of illness and lower the risk of possible complications. It should be taken as early as possible by all who test positive >65 years of age, or persons of any age with underlying chronic medical conditions as outlined in the link above.
- By now we are all aware of common sense strategies to protect us from all respiratory illnesses:
  - o frequent handwashing
  - o making a daily assessment of your health before you leave your home
  - o staying home if you are sick!!
  - o staying away from people who are sick
  - o avoiding indoor crowded spaces, especially if you are high risk or live with persons who are

And then there is the “masking question”! The decision to mask or not to mask is a personal one. Despite all the controversy, a well fitting mask worn properly is effective at reducing your risk of infection, and reducing the risk of you giving an infection to others around you. Anyone may choose to wear a mask at any time in order to protect themselves or others. I do not anticipate any masking mandates unless things change drastically – never say never – viruses are not totally predictable. Recommendations will depend on circumstances, such as the intensity of infections around you, whether or not you and others in your household are in high risk categories, and your willingness to tolerate risk. The moral issue boils down to the balance between freedom and responsibility. Watch: [It may be time to break out the masks against Covid, some experts say | CNN](#)

### **ACTIONS:**

- **practice common sense strategies**
- **have FREE at-home tests on hand – Health Dept in Woodfords (530-694-2146, Option 2) or Bear Valley at the Public Safety Office (209-753-2232) and use them if you feel sick!**
- **If you want to be evaluated to see if you qualify for FREE treatment with Paxlovid, call me at 530-694-2146, Option 1.**
- **The older you are, and if you have any underlying chronic medical conditions at any age, contact your pharmacy to get vaccinated once you hear that vaccine has been released (expected by the end of September).**

[RSV \(Respiratory Syncytial Virus\) | CDC](#)

[Influenza \(Flu\) | CDC](#) and [FluVaxView | FluVaxView | Seasonal Influenza \(Flu\) | CDC](#)

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>

[Risk Assessment Summary for SARS CoV-2 Sublineage BA.2.86 | CDC](#)



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