



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

December 21, 2023

Dear Colleagues:

We are writing to provide you with information about the current status of respiratory viruses - COVID, influenza and RSV - in Maryland, and to encourage you to take several actions to help respond and minimize the impact of these viruses on patients, particularly boosting immunization rates among eligible populations. A recent [CDC Health Alert](#) provided national data on elevated respiratory virus activity, also urging clinicians to promote vaccination, and to counsel patients on other preventive measures.

Overview of Respiratory Virus Activity in Maryland

In general, Maryland is experiencing ongoing elevated COVID activity and rising influenza activity. Data suggests that RSV activity might be beginning to decline.

- COVID
 - The [number of COVID hospitalizations in Maryland](#) has increased approximately 25% in the past month.
 - [CDC estimates](#) that only 25% of adults and 19% of children 6 months-17 years are up to date on the updated 2023-2024 COVID vaccine.
- Influenza
 - Of clinical laboratories reporting [influenza testing results](#) to MDH, the percent positivity has increased 52%, from 6.2% during the week ending December 2 to 10.2% during the week ending December 9.
 - [CDC estimates](#) that 45% of adults and 51% of children 6 months-17 years are up to date on the 2023-2024 influenza vaccination.
- RSV
 - There were 175 [RSV hospitalizations](#) reported in Maryland during the week ending December 16th, compared to 226 reported the prior week.
 - [CDC estimates](#) that only 29% of adults 60 years and older have received the RSV vaccine.

MDH Recommendations for Clinicians, Hospitals, Long Term Care Facilities and Other Healthcare Settings

1) Vaccination

- Encourage eligible patients to be vaccinated against [COVID](#), [influenza](#), and [RSV](#), if recommended. Consider using the [CDC Conversation Guide for Healthcare Providers](#) for tips on making a strong vaccine recommendation to your patients.
- All healthcare workers should also receive recommended respiratory virus vaccinations against COVID and influenza. Healthcare settings should provide these vaccinations to

their healthcare workers or at a minimum facilitate access to these vaccinations.

2) Source control (masking)

- MDH recommends that broad facility-wide source control should be implemented in all patient care areas and patient-facing healthcare settings, including outpatient and long term care, when the statewide combined weekly respiratory virus-associated hospitalization rate ([as calculated by CDC](#)) meets or exceeds 10 hospitalizations per 100,000 residents.
- Broad facility-wide source control can be discontinued once the combined weekly respiratory virus-associated hospitalization rate has been below 10 hospitalizations per 100,000 residents for two consecutive weeks.
- More information is available here:
<https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/Pages/resp-virus-metric.aspx>

3) Other actions

- Healthcare providers should ensure that their practices have up-to-date contingency staffing plans to accommodate increased patient volume or staff absences.
- Hospital healthcare providers should ensure familiarity with the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) [Critical Care Coordination Center \(C4\)](#). The overarching goal for the C4 is for patients to receive the “Right Care, at the Right Time, at the Right Place”, including helping physicians identify available hospital critical care resources when patient transfers are necessary. Any Maryland hospital with a patient needing a critical care transfer, treatment guidance, or in need of a pediatric bed can contact the C4 at 410-706-7797.

We appreciate your attention to this situation.

Sincerely,



Niles Kalyanaraman, MD FACP
Deputy Secretary, Public Health Services