

Dec. 9, 2022

### **Local health officers and health care leaders recommend wearing masks indoors**

Communities across our state and around the U.S. are experiencing an unprecedented surge in viral respiratory illnesses, including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), influenza and COVID-19. As health officers and health care leaders working to improve the health of Washington residents, we recommend that everyone wear a high-quality, well-fitting mask when around others in indoor spaces to protect against both acquiring and spreading these infections to others.

We also urge everyone who is eligible to stay up to date on your vaccinations. Vaccinations are the most important way to protect against severe influenza and COVID-19 infections, including hospitalization and death. Everyone 6 months and older should be vaccinated against these diseases and those who are eligible for an updated COVID-19 booster should get it now.

Other necessary strategies include:

- Staying home from work and school and testing for COVID-19 if you develop symptoms.
- Having a plan for rapid treatment for [COVID-19](#) and [influenza](#) for people who are at increased risk for severe infections.
- Improving indoor air quality through ventilation, filtration, and UV technology where appropriate.

We expect the flu to circulate for months, so now is the time to get your flu shot!

The flu is most dangerous for:

- Children under 5 years (especially under 2).
- Adults 65 years or older.
- Those who are pregnant.
- Anyone living with a health condition like asthma, diabetes or heart disease.

Consult with your physician or healthcare provider about the need for testing or treatment if you are at increased risk for severe influenza or are unsure.

In addition to RSV and influenza, new COVID-19 variants are taking hold and immunity from past vaccination is waning for many people who have not yet received an updated booster shot. The surge in these viruses is resulting in many illnesses, contributing to rising absenteeism in schools this fall. This impact extends to businesses, workers, and families.

For people who develop symptoms, and for parents of young children, it's important to [know when to contact your physician or healthcare provider for advice or an evaluation](#).

Working together and using multiple, layered strategies to limit the spread and impact of these viruses will provide benefits to all of us during this fall and winter respiratory virus season and help relieve serious stress on our healthcare system.

Thank you to everyone for doing what you can to help.

**Local health officers**

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH, Health Officer, Thurston County Public Health  
Allison Berry, MD, MPH, Health Officer, Clallam and Jefferson Counties  
Anthony L-T Chen, MD, MPH, Director of Health, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department  
Jeff Duchin, MD, Health Officer, Public Health - Seattle and King County  
Amy Harley, MD, MPH, Co-Health Officer, Whatcom County Health Department  
Frank James, MD, Health Officer, San Juan County Health & Community Services  
Steven Krager, MD, MPH, Deputy Health Officer, Clark, Pacific and Skamania Counties  
Mark Larson, MD, Health Officer, Kittitas County Public Health Department  
James Lewis, MD, MPH, Health Officer, Snohomish Health District  
Alan Melnick, MD, MPH, Health Officer, Clark, Pacific and Skamania Counties  
Gib Morrow, MD, MPH, Health Officer, Kitsap Public Health District  
Greg Thompson, MD, MPH, Co-Health Officer, Whatcom County Health Department

**Health care leaders**

June M. Altaras, MN, NEA-BC, Executive Vice President, Chief Quality, Safety and Nursing Officer, MultiCare Health System  
Michael H. Anderson, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Virginia Mason Franciscan Health  
Mike Barsotti, MD, FAAP, President, Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Tori Bernier, Chief Nursing Officer, Summit Pacific Medical Center  
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Mike Glenn, MHA, Chief Executive Officer, Jefferson Healthcare  
Jennifer A. Graves, RN, MS, Vice President, Quality and Safety, Kaiser Permanente Northwest and Kaiser Permanente Washington, Regional Chief Nursing Executive, Kaiser Permanente Washington  
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Mark Johnson, MD, President, Washington Academy of Family Physicians  
Scott Kennedy, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Olympic Medical Center  
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Onora Lien, Executive Director, Northwest Healthcare Response Network  
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Ruth McDonald, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Seattle Children's  
Deb Murphy, MPA, J.D., President & Chief Executive Officer, LeadingAge Washington  
Ettore Palazzo, MD, FACP, Chief Medical & Quality Officer, EvergreenHealth  
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