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Managing the 2024-2025 Respiratory Illness Season: A Guide for Governors

 cori@jh.edu



cori.centerforhealthsecurity.org



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
of PUBLIC HEALTH

Center for
Health Security

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What's Expected This Season?

The good news is that this year's respiratory season (Fall 2024 - Winter 2025) will likely be similar to or better than last year. The CDC estimates there's an [80% chance](#) we'll see about the same number of people in hospitals for COVID-19, RSVⁱ, and flu combined, or maybe even fewer. But there's still a small chance (about 18%) that things could get worse, especially if we see new COVID variants, tough flu strains, or if fewer people get vaccinated.

However, even a season that isn't considered too bad can still have a big impact on individuals, families, businesses, and the healthcare system. Looking at last year's numbers helps us know what to expect:

- [The flu hit hard](#), affecting between 34-75 million people
- [Hospitals were busy](#), treating between 380,000-900,000 flu patients
- We lost thousands of people to respiratory viruses. An estimated 17,000-100,000 people died from [flu](#), 41,000 from [COVID-19](#), and 100-300 from [RSV](#)

This year, in a given week, for every 100,000 people, [states might expect to see about](#):

- 4 RSV patients in hospitals
- 9 flu patients in hospitals
- 4-10 COVID patients in hospitals

Current Seasonal Severity: As of the end of December 2024, hospitalization rates for [flu](#), [RSV](#), and [COVID-19](#) remain lower than the projections above. If hospitalization rates for this year follow a trend like last year, with the peak hospitalization rates at the end of December, these rates may decline and remain even lower the remainder of the season. Follow the [In-Season Severity Assessment](#) and [RESP-Net](#) for the latest data.

[Last year, 200 children died from the flu](#), setting a new record since 2019. The majority (80%) of these deaths were among children who were not fully vaccinated. [Flu vaccinations for this year are the lowest since 2019](#), indicating children may be more vulnerable to hospitalization and death than in recent years.

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What Can Governors Do?

Governors play a key role in supporting public health in their communities and making sure everyone has what they need to stay healthy.

When Things Are Going as Expected

When cases are similar to last year (which is expected), Governors can:

- Keep an eye on local trends with their health teams and look at ways to share information and maintain transparency with the public about potential threats to their health
- Help spread the word about steps individuals can take to prevent and mitigate infections
- Make sure hospitals have enough staff and supplies, including access to resources that may be available in national/state stockpiles such as [Tamiflu](#)
- Support schools and workplaces in keeping people healthy, which may include partner engagement, information on vaccine clinics, or messaging campaign efforts
- Evaluate community access to resources and workforce needs, including who in the state is authorized to provide vaccination for flu, RSV, and COVID, particularly with the federal authority provided to pharmacists to vaccinate for these illnesses in the [Public](#) Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act having lapsed at the end of December
- Consider implementing [standing orders](#) to [authorize](#) nurses, pharmacists, and other healthcare personnel to administer vaccines

When pharmacies can vaccinate, there are reductions in healthcare costs, hospitalizations and deaths.

The PREP Act Expired December 31, 2024. This ends COVID-era liability protections for vaccine administration, and pharmacists will no longer be able to administer vaccines to children in half of U.S. states. Governors can issue standing orders that allow pharmacists to vaccinate to overcome this issue.



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Some states have already shown great ways to ensure communities stay healthy during the respiratory season.

[Colorado](#) Governor Jared Polis and Rhode Island Governor Dan McKee got their shots publicly to encourage others to do the same. Both Governors promoted the importance of vaccines and highlighted where to locate a vaccine provider in the state in press releases. [Rhode Island](#) made it easy for families to get vaccinated by offering shots at schools after hours, regardless of insurance status. [Ohio](#) Governor Mike DeWine also made it easier for all residents to access primary health care, including treatment for winter illnesses and vaccines, by setting up a mobile clinic in Springfield, Ohio.



Governor McKee, Health Officials Kick Off Flu Vaccination Campaign



Governor, First Lady DeWine Unveil New Mobile Health Clinic to Expand Access to Primary Care in Springfield

Governor Hochul, State Health Commissioner Expanded Access to 2024-2025 COVID-19 Vaccine to All Eligible New Yorkers





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If Things Get Tougher

Although there is only a small chance (about 18%) that the current respiratory season will be worse than last year, viruses are unpredictable. If we see new COVID variants, tough flu strains, or if fewer people get vaccinated, the current season could be worse.

If more people start getting sick than expected, Governors might need to:

- Maintain situational awareness of supply chain shortages (e.g., I.V. solution) and provide guidance or seek alternative resources as needed
- Bring together different state agencies to coordinate responses and assess whether it would be beneficial to declare a public health emergency to open additional resources
- Help hospitals work together to transfer patients when needed
- Identify available resources to allocate extra funding for public health, healthcare staffing and supplies, or other community needs
- Support efforts to provide needed tests to schools and workplaces
- Promote awareness of virus impacts and steps individuals can take to protect themselves

As of 2023, there are new tools for preventing RSV: There are new vaccines for infants, pregnant mothers and older adults. All vaccines are approved by the FDA and recommended by the CDC. Governors may consider working with their health policy advisors and health departments to increase public awareness and utilization of these vaccines when things are going as expected, but especially if the season is getting tougher.

During a previous surge of severe RSV cases among children, [former Maryland Governor Larry Hogan](#) quickly set up ways for hospitals to work together and make sure they had the staff and supplies they needed

Current Threat: CDC has reported [unprecedented levels of Mycoplasma pneumoniae](#) infections in children, a common cause of “walking pneumonia,” likely due to pandemic-era isolation reducing immunity. Doctors should test for it alongside COVID, flu and RSV since it requires aggressive antibiotic treatment.

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Keys to Success

To make these work, Governors and their staff can:

- Keep people informed about what’s happening and where to get help
- Make sure hospitals have what they need
- Help schools and workplaces create healthy environments

Staying on Top of Things

Governors can track how things are going through the CDC’s [interactive dashboards](#) and by partnering with their state health department.

Most respiratory seasons are manageable with good planning and teamwork. Having clear plans for both normal and tough scenarios can help states protect their communities while keeping the healthcare system running smoothly.

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ⁱ RSV is one of the most common causes of childhood respiratory illness and results in annual outbreaks of respiratory illnesses in all age groups. An estimated 58,000 to 80,000 children under 5 years of age, most of them infants, are hospitalized each year nationwide due to RSV infection, with some requiring oxygen, intravenous (IV) fluids, or mechanical ventilation (a machine to help with breathing). Each year, an estimated 100 to 300 children younger than 5 years of age die due to RSV.