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Washington Physician Groups Urge Preventive Measures as ERs See Influx of RSV and Flu Patients

SEATTLE (Updated Nov. 23, 2022) – Physicians across Washington are seeing an unusually steep rise in the number of cases of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), particularly in children, as well as an [escalating number](#) of pediatric flu cases—including the state’s first pediatric flu-related death. Washington children are already experiencing significant delays in access to pediatric hospital beds and are boarding in emergency rooms. We need your help to lower virus transmission to preserve these limited life-saving pediatric resources.

As we head into the holiday season, we are joining together today to urge all Washingtonians to take preventive health measures to avoid the spread of these respiratory illnesses. By following these simple preventive steps, we can reduce transmission of these viruses, help prevent further disruptions to our children’s education and development, and help keep our critical care services available for everyone.

- Everyone 6 months and older who is able should be vaccinated for influenza and COVID-19. People ages 5 years and older who had their last COVID-19 shot at least two months ago can get the updated booster. Influenza and COVID-19 vaccines can be safely given at the same time.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, and be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth. RSV is highly transmittable through touching infected surfaces. Disinfect high-touch surfaces in your home frequently. Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing, preferably with a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
- Please wear a mask in crowded indoor settings to protect children and vulnerable adults from these respiratory infections. Kids and adults with mild symptoms like occasional cough and nasal congestion should first test for COVID-19. If they are COVID-19 negative, they should wear a mask in public places until their symptoms resolve. Remember that masking is still required in all health care settings.

- If your child is showing moderate symptoms of illness, such as fever, cough, difficulty breathing, congestion, runny nose, sore throat, do not send them to school or group activities. Have them stay home and treat the symptoms as needed. If you have questions or concerns, call your family physician or pediatrician for advice or to make an appointment. Adults experiencing symptoms should also stay home and contact their physician for advice.
- If you think you or your child may need medical attention, contact your family physician or pediatrician first before going to the emergency department. Your primary care office can advise whether your child should be seen and which health care setting would best be able to care for the sick child. If you are unable to reach your primary care office, consider going to an urgent care center or check if telehealth is an option. A nurse triage line through your primary care clinic or insurance provider can help you determine the most appropriate setting for care.

Remember, you should only use a hospital emergency room for very serious or life-threatening problems. Hospital emergency rooms are not the place to go for common illnesses or minor injuries. If you are experiencing any serious or life-threatening symptoms, call 911 or get to your nearest hospital emergency room.

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About the Washington State Medical Association

The WSMA represents more than 12,000 physicians, physician assistants, resident physicians, and medical students across all specialties and practice types in Washington state. The WSMA has advocated on behalf of the house of medicine for more than 125 years. Our vision is to make Washington state the best place to practice medicine and receive care.

About the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatricians

The WCAAP represents over 1,200 pediatric health care professionals from across Washington State. Our mission is to optimize the health and well-being of children and their families while advancing pediatric care. WCAAP frames and leads the public discussion on child health issues, advances public policy to benefit children, and empowers pediatric clinicians to provide quality medical care.

About the Washington Academy of Family Physicians

With more than 3,900 members, the WAFP is the largest medical specialty professional organization in Washington. Its members include physicians, residents, and medical students who specialize in family medicine. The organization works to influence the development of policy that will provide optimal health for all people of Washington state.