

MONOGRAM

SEPTEMBER 2023



Fall 2023 Respiratory Disease Update: Immunizations & Winter Protection

Fall is here, and so are the bugs! Not just those that fly, bite, and sting, but also the respiratory viruses that impact our daily lives each fall and winter. With an expected uptick in various illness, Influenza (Flu), Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), and COVID-19 (Coronavirus), residents and visitors are encouraged to protect their families by becoming vaccinated and protected.

When you or your children are ill, please protect others by staying home when possible. Remember that your common cold might hospitalize one of the next people who catches it.

Masks are another way to protect others. If you are sick but unable to stay home you are strongly encouraged to use a high-quality mask in indoor public places.

For prevention, given the number of COVID-19 infections in our communities now it is reasonable for people who want to protect themselves to use masks in indoor public places.

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Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is once again widespread in our region, and hospitalizations are increasing throughout California. While hospitalization levels remain far below the rates seen during previous COVID-19 surges, we anticipate a steady increase as we enter the winter months. Currently, most individuals hospitalized for COVID-19 are elderly, and under-vaccinated.

Current forecasts for winter respiratory disease suggest it may be another challenging winter for hospitals and communities. While it is not easy to forecast such things, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) estimates that the COVID-19 impact during this cold weather season will be comparable to last winter, and Flu and RSV cold weather epidemics will probably be typical of pre-pandemic cold seasons. Together, these three respiratory viruses can be expected to kill thousands of people and put many more in the hospital. Now, for the first time, vaccines are available to reduce the risk of all three, and the level of severe disease that communities experience this respiratory disease season will depend in part on how many people choose to get vaccinated.

Mono County Public Health encourages virtually everyone to get a flu shot and an updated COVID shot this fall. The updated COVID vaccine provides better protection against current variants and will boost the immunity of people who get it. The newest COVID-19 vaccine will be available sometime this month. Our strongest recommendations for getting vaccinated are for older people due to their higher risk, but it is recommended for everyone 6 months or older. Many younger people who get severe COVID don't have the usual risk factors.

You must wait at least two months after getting any other COVID vaccine before getting the new updated one.

COVID vaccines will remain free for most people. They will be covered by virtually all insurance companies and should be available from local pharmacies and medical practices. There are programs in place to provide free vaccines to people who don't have insurance coverage for vaccination. The Mono County Health Division will be able to provide COVID vaccination to people who do not have other access to it.

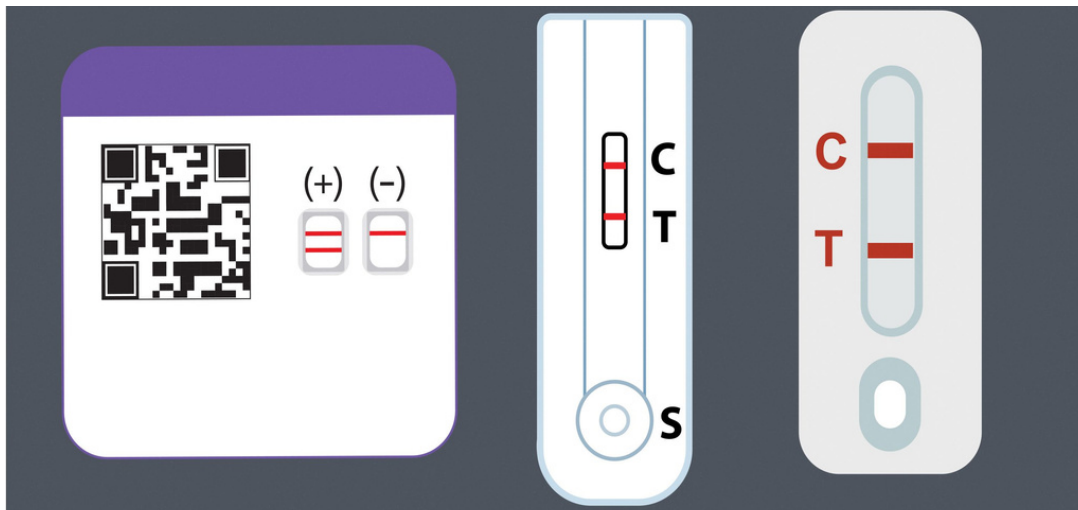
Value of COVID-19 Updated Vaccines for Older Individuals:

- Most of us by now have some level of immune protection against severe disease, either from vaccination, infection or often both;
- Immunity against severe disease weakens with time, especially in older people;
- Most people hospitalized these days for COVID-19 are at least 70 years old;
- The point of COVID-19 vaccination is primarily to prevent severe disease by maintaining partial immunity. These vaccines are very effective in preventing hospitalization and death.
 - Protection against mild and asymptomatic infections is not as strong and tends to last only a few months; and,
- Vaccines are safe, and it is hard to predict who will end up in the hospital with COVID-19, so it makes sense to err on the side of vaccination.

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Covid-19 (Coronavirus)



If You Do Get Sick:

Early treatment generally prevents progression to severe COVID-19, so don't delay testing. Everyone 12 years and older who tests positive for COVID-19 and has symptoms should ask a doctor about treatment.

If you tested positive for COVID-19, are having symptoms, and are unable to connect with a medical provider within 24 hours of knowing you have COVID, you can call (833) 686-5051 or make an appointment at www.sesamecare.com/COVID for a free telehealth visit.

Real-world data shows early treatment for COVID-19 helps prevent hospitalization

Adults* prescribed Paxlovid for mild-to-moderate COVID-19 were **51% less likely** to be hospitalized than those who weren't

* regardless of vaccination status

IF YOU HAVE COVID-19 SYMPTOMS:

- 1 TEST**
Use a self-test, locate a test site, or find a Test to Treat location
- 2 TALK**
If you test positive, talk to a health care professional about treatment
- 3 TREAT**
Start treatment within 5 days

COVID-19 medications Paxlovid and Lagevrio are currently free for anyone in California, regardless of patient's insurance or immigration status.

Employers and workers are reminded to follow CalOSHA's post-emergency COVID-19 guidance and resources, which are in effect until 2025.

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Influenza (Flu)

Influenza (Flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. Flu can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

The best way to prevent flu is by getting a flu shot each year. The flu shot is recommended for everyone six months and older. However, as with COVID-19, the older the person and the more existing medical problems, the more the value of flu shots. Flu shots have been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization, and death. Similar to wearing a mask, the flu vaccine protects the immunized person, as well as the people around them.



Flu shot benefits include:

- Reduces the risk of flu illness by about half;
- Decreases the severity of illness in individuals who get the shot, but still get sick.
- Reduces likelihood of getting the flu and needing to go to a doctor's office, urgent care, or emergency room;
- Reduces time lost at work and/or school due to illness
- Reduces likelihood of being hospitalized or dying from flu;

The CDC's information on the benefits of flu vaccination can be accessed [here](#).

Flu shots are available from pharmacies, primary care medical clinics, and at **Mono County Public Health Weekly Clinics**.

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Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) is a common seasonal respiratory virus that, like influenza, hospitalizes and kills thousands of people each year. RSV is best known as an annual winter epidemic that severely affects babies and young children, causing bronchiolitis and pneumonia. In most adults, RSV presents as a common cold, but like Flu and COVID-19, elderly individuals and people with a range of health conditions are at risk for severe disease.

Importantly, there are two new RSV vaccines available for people over 60 years old. The studies that led to their Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval showed they are effective at preventing severe disease. At this time, these new vaccines are recommended for those people 60 and over with higher risk for severe disease, in consultation with one's health care provider (CDC recommends "shared decision making"). Mono County Public Health is not providing the RSV vaccine.

One of the new RSV vaccines, Abrysvo, has very recently been approved by the FDA for use in late pregnancy to protect infants through the first six months of life, but national recommendations for use have yet to be published.

There is also a new anti-RSV monoclonal antibody, nirsevimab, to provide protection for young babies through the winter RSV season. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a single dose of nirsevimab for all children born into RSV season or entering the winter season when less than 8 months old. It is also recommended for children 8-19 months with higher risk for severe disease who are entering their second RSV season. Consult your pediatric health care provider about this important preventive measure.

