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
Timothy Dellit, MD, interim Chief Executive Officer, UW Medicine, interim Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs and interim Dean of the UW School of Medicine
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
Sean Gregory, Chief Executive, PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center
Carlton Heine, MD, PhD, FACEP, FAWM, Chapter President, Washington American College of Emergency Physicians
Mark Johnson, MD, President, Washington Academy of Family Physicians
Scott Kennedy, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Olympic Medical Center
Robb Kimmes, Chief Executive Officer, Skyline Health
David Knoepfler, MD, MBA, Chief Medical Officer, FACP, FHM, Overlake Medical Center
Onora Lien, Executive Director, Northwest Healthcare Response Network
Carma Matti-Jackson, President & Chief Executive Officer, Washington Health Care Association
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
Charles Prosper, Chief Executive Officer, PeaceHealth St Joseph Medical Center
Katina Rue, DO, President, Washington State Medical Association
Cassie Sauer, President & Chief Executive Officer, Washington State Hospital Association
Arooj Simmonds, MD, Regional Chief Medical Officer, Puget Sound Region, Providence Swedish
Dori Unterseher MN, RN, Chief Nursing Officer, Harbor Regional Health
Lynnette Vehrs, RN, MN, President, Washington State Nurses Association
Darryl Wolfe, Chief Executive Officer, Olympic Medical Center