



HEALTH ADVISORY

Public Health

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Protect yourself and the community from respiratory infections

The San Bernardino County Department of Public Health urges residents to take proactive measures to protect themselves against respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, seasonal influenza (flu), and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). While some people may experience mild symptoms when they contract COVID-19, flu, or RSV, others can become seriously ill, with some requiring hospitalization. The severity of each season depends on the circulating strains and overall immunity within the population.

The influenza season in San Bernardino County typically starts in November and continues through April. Vaccination against COVID-19 and flu remains the most effective way to protect yourself and your loved ones from these viruses and their potentially serious outcomes. This is especially important for those at higher risk of developing severe illness, such as older adults, and individuals with underlying medical conditions.

Understanding COVID-19, Flu, and RSV: How to Protect Yourself and Recognize Symptoms

COVID-19:

- **How to Protect Yourself:** Stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccinations, including receiving booster doses as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Wearing a mask in crowded or indoor settings can also help reduce the risk of transmission.
- **Signs and Symptoms:** Symptoms may vary widely but often include fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, body aches, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, and headache. Severe cases may involve difficulty breathing or chest pain.
- **When to Seek Medical Attention:** If you experience difficulty breathing, persistent chest pain, confusion, or bluish lips or face, seek medical care immediately. Antiviral treatments and monoclonal antibodies may be available for high-risk individuals.

Testing remains an important tool in managing the spread of COVID-19. Rapid antigen tests, or "at-home tests," can provide results in as little as 15 to 30 minutes, allowing you to make informed decisions about your health and minimize the risk to others. Free COVID-19 testing kits are available for San Bernardino County residents. You can pick up test kits at various County locations, including select community events, public libraries, and County health centers. For a complete list of locations, visit sbcovid19.sbcounty.gov/rapidtests. Additionally, the [United States Postal Service](https://www.usps.com) offers free shipping of four COVID-19 test kits per household. Many health insurance plans also cover the cost of at-home COVID-19 tests, providing residents another option to access test kits at no extra charge.



Flu:

- **How to Protect Yourself:** The CDC recommends an annual flu vaccine for everyone aged 6 months and older. Additionally, flu vaccines can lessen the severity of symptoms and prevent flu-related hospitalizations and deaths. Frequent handwashing, avoiding close contact with sick individuals, and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces are important preventative measures.
- **Signs and Symptoms:** Flu symptoms typically include fever, chills, muscle aches, cough, sore throat, runny nose, and fatigue. Some individuals may also experience vomiting and diarrhea, particularly in children.
- **When to Seek Medical Attention:** If you are at higher risk and develop flu symptoms, contact your healthcare provider right away. Antiviral medications can help reduce the severity of symptoms if taken early.

RSV:

- **How to Protect Yourself:** While an RSV vaccine is currently available for adults, especially older adults, RSV prevention also includes practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently, cleaning surfaces, and avoiding contact with sick individuals.
- **Signs and Symptoms:** RSV symptoms are similar to those of a cold, including runny nose, coughing, sneezing, fever, and wheezing. In severe cases, RSV can lead to bronchiolitis or pneumonia, particularly in infants, young children, and older adults.
- **When to Seek Medical Attention:** If an infant or elderly person has difficulty breathing, is not drinking enough fluids, or exhibits worsening symptoms, seek medical care immediately.

Who is at Risk?

Certain groups are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, flu, and RSV, including:

- Adults aged 65 and older
- Children under 5, especially those under 2 years old
- Pregnant women
- Individuals with chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, or asthma
- Individuals with weakened immune systems

“Getting vaccinated and utilizing testing when needed are simple, effective steps we can all take to reduce the spread of illness and keep our communities safe,” stated Dr. Michael Sequeira, San Bernardino County Health Officer. “The more proactive we are, the better we can protect our most vulnerable residents and avoid overwhelming our healthcare systems.”

Healthcare Facilities and Employees

For healthcare facilities and employees, San Bernardino County Department of Public Health recommends continued adherence to [Health and Safety Code section 1288.7](#), which ensures healthcare facilities provide no-cost influenza vaccination to their employees. Healthcare facilities should ensure mitigation plans are developed and in place for those who decline vaccinations, to prevent transmission of influenza to patients, their families, and the community.

Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) Surveillance Dashboard

The Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) surveillance dashboard is an interactive and flexible platform that combines data from multiple sources to provide a comprehensive view of the infectious disease response in the county.

The ILI dashboard was developed using ESRI technology for near real-time data visualizations. It provides information on the number of ILI-related hospitalizations, ER visits, respiratory disease

cases, and deaths due to influenza-related illnesses. By monitoring the prevalence of influenza-like illness in the community, public health officials can more accurately track trends and take action to better protect the public.

We encourage everyone to take advantage of this valuable resource and stay informed about the health of our community. The ILI surveillance dashboard can be accessed by visiting bit.ly/ILIDashboard.

For more information

By staying informed, getting vaccinated, and taking proactive steps to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, we can all help protect our loved ones and our community. The San Bernardino County Department of Public Health encourages everyone to utilize available resources, including vaccines and testing, to stay healthy this season. For more information and to access public health tools, visit dph.sbcounty.gov. To schedule a vaccination appointment near you, visit MyTurn.ca.gov. Together, we can reduce the impact of COVID-19, flu, and RSV in our communities.

Additional Online Resources for Influenza

- [Department of Public Health](#)
- [California Department of Public Health](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)