



HEALTH ADVISORY # 220 Updated COVID-19 Recommendations

TO: West Virginia Healthcare Providers, Hospitals and Other Healthcare Facilities

FROM: Matthew Christiansen, MD, MPH, State Health Officer
West Virginia Department of Health, Bureau for Public Health

DATE: March 15, 2024

LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS: Please distribute to community health providers, hospital-based physicians, infection control preventionists, laboratory directors and other applicable partners.

OTHER RECIPIENTS: Please distribute to association members, staff, etc.

Older Adults Now Eligible for Additional Dose of Updated COVID-19 Vaccine

On February 28, 2024, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) endorsed the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendation for adults ages 65 years and older to receive an **additional** updated 2023-24 COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19 continues to be a major cause of serious respiratory illness in West Virginia. COVID-19 has been one of the leading causes of mortality among West Virginians, with over 8,000 deaths reported since 2020. Vaccination is the most effective tool to protect your patients from severe illness. People who are aged 65 years and older who received 1 dose of any updated 2023-24 COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Novavax) are now eligible to receive an additional dose at least 4 months after the previous updated dose.

Updated Respiratory Guidance:

On March 1, 2024, CDC updated their COVID-19 guidelines to streamline recommendations for common respiratory viral illnesses such as COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). The updated recommendations continue to protect those at greatest risk for severe morbidity and mortality. While every respiratory virus does not act the same, adopting a unified approach makes recommendations easier to understand and more likely to be followed. Additionally, many individuals with mild illness do not get tested, therefore they do not know which virus they have.

The following summarizes the updated respiratory guidance: **(this guidance is not intended for healthcare settings)**

This message was directly distributed by the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health to local health departments and professional associations. Receiving entities are responsible for further disseminating the information as appropriate to the target audience.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

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- People who get sick with a respiratory illness should stay home and away from others.
- People may return to normal activities (work and school) when symptoms have been getting better overall for 24 hours, and if fever was present, it has been gone for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.
- Once people resume normal activities; they are encouraged to take precautions for the next 5 days to curb disease spread including: proper hand hygiene practices, wearing a mask, and keeping distance from others. These precautions are especially important to those who are at risk for severe illness including those who are immunocompromised and those over 65 years of age and older.

While respiratory viruses remain a public health threat, we are in a different place from the beginning of the pandemic. We have more tools than ever before to combat COVID-19, influenza, and RSV including vaccines for all three major respiratory viruses. We are seeing far fewer hospitalizations and deaths associated with COVID-19 and population immunity is at a much higher degree due to vaccination, prior infection, or both.

For questions about this health alert, contact the Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services, Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology (DIDE) at (304) 558-5358 ext. 2.

Resources:

For additional information on the updated respiratory guidance visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/respiratory-virus-guidance.html>.

For information on staying up to date with your vaccines visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/tools-resources/health-care-providers.html#talk-to-patients>.

For additional data on respiratory illnesses impacting WV visit: <https://dhhr.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>.

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