



Health Advisory for SF Providers: Influenza and Respiratory Virus Season 2022–23

November 23, 2022

Situational update

Seasonal influenza activity has begun early in California and San Francisco and is increasing rapidly (see data from: [SFPDPH](#), [CDPH](#), [CDC](#), and [wastewater](#)). Unlike the last two years, this year's influenza season may resemble pre-COVID-19 flu seasons but with peak activity occurring earlier.

This Health Advisory is designed to help San Francisco clinicians prepare for an expected increase in infections, outpatient visits, and hospitalizations for flu and other respiratory illnesses. With RSV infections at high levels and COVID-19 cases on the rise again, and with the continued emergence of multiple Omicron [subvariants](#), it is important to prepare for co-circulation of multiple respiratory viruses that may cause significant impacts to morbidity and mortality, as well as to already strained healthcare systems.

Symptoms of flu, RSV, COVID-19, and other respiratory viruses may be similar, and testing may be used to differentiate them. This is particularly important for patients at [higher risk for severe illness from flu](#) or [COVID-19](#) who are candidates for anti-viral treatment. Many patients are not aware that they are at higher risk, and these patients can benefit from prompt (ideally within 48 hours) treatment with Tamiflu for flu or Paxlovid for COVID-19.

Actions requested of San Francisco clinicians

1. At every opportunity, strongly recommend and administer **flu vaccine** for all patients at least 6 months of age. Review recommendations for this year from [SFPDPH](#).
 - Note that this year, adults aged 65 years or older are recommended but not required to receive a higher dose “senior flu vaccine” formulation.
2. Ensure **all staff** who work in healthcare facilities **are vaccinated** as soon as possible with both the annual flu vaccine (mandated by [health officer order](#)) and the updated bivalent COVID-19 booster.
 - Taking this action can reduce transmission to vulnerable patients as well as lower staff absenteeism during peak transmission periods and help prevent critical staffing shortages.



3. Maximize the use of phone advice lines, telehealth, and rapid outpatient [workflows](#) so patients can access advice or care rapidly without needing to go to seasonally busy urgent care or emergency departments.
4. **Test** patients with respiratory symptoms to distinguish between flu and COVID-19 if it affects clinical management (e.g. in patients who may benefit from Tamiflu or Paxlovid).
 - Multiplex assays that detect flu A/B and COVID-19 simultaneously can be useful in symptomatic patients.
 - Negative results from rapid antigen tests should be confirmed by PCR/nucleic acid tests.
5. **Treat** patients (e.g. with Tamiflu) at [higher risk for severe illness](#) within 48 hours of symptom onset.
 - If flu is suspected in someone at higher risk, begin treatment even before test results return.
 - Prescribe antiviral **chemoprophylaxis** (Tamiflu) without delay for those at higher risk for flu-related complications who have been exposed to flu, especially in congregate settings.
6. Implement **infection control** precautions according to [healthcare facility guidelines](#).
 - Symptomatic staff and visitors should stay at home until symptoms improve and at least 24 hours after fever resolves.
 - In all healthcare settings, anyone with respiratory symptoms should wear a surgical or higher-grade mask.
7. **Report** promptly any of the following to SFDPH Communicable Disease Control by phone (415) 554-2830 or fax (415) 554-2848.
 - Acute respiratory outbreaks in institutions/congregate settings (e.g. long-term care facilities) with at least one case of laboratory-confirmed influenza in the setting of a cluster (≥ 2 cases) of influenza like illness within a 72-hour period.
 - Laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated fatal pediatric cases < 18 years.

Additional resources

Within San Francisco, the public can call 311 for basic information about influenza.

Share this holiday checklist with patients to help them prepare for flu, RSV, and COVID-19 this winter: <https://sf.gov/holiday-checklist>.



Program Contact Information:

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<https://www.sfdcp.org>

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