



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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In reply, please refer to:
File:

September 6, 2023

MEDICAL ADVISORY UPDATE – COVID-19 AND INFLUENZA INFECTIONS INCREASING STATEWIDE

Healthcare providers should:

- Ensure patients at high risk of severe COVID-19 illness are fully [up to date](#) on all recommended COVID-19 vaccines.
- Vaccinate against influenza. Influenza vaccinations should be offered to all persons ≥ 6 months of age who do not have contraindications and can be administered at the same visit with COVID-19 vaccine.
- While respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is not currently circulating at high levels in Hawaii, vaccinating older (≥ 60 years) [at-risk](#) adults now can prevent future respiratory disease including severe infections such as pneumonia.
- Advise those at high risk of getting sick to wear a high-quality mask or respirator (e.g., N95 or KN95) when indoors in public. Advise those who have close contact with someone at high risk for getting very sick to consider self-testing to detect infection before contact and consider wearing a high-quality mask when indoors with them.
- Test promptly to detect treatable infections (e.g., COVID-19, influenza) and facilitate early treatment.

Dear Healthcare Provider:

The Hawaii Department of Health is monitoring increases in COVID-19 and influenza infections in our state. Providers can help prevent severe illness and reduce disease burden from circulating respiratory viruses by promoting and administering COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccines, counseling patients on mitigation measures such as masking, and testing to guide early treatment with a pathogen-specific antiviral.

EPIDEMIOLOGIC TRENDS

COVID-19

Nationally, the trend of COVID-19 new hospital admissions, CDC's primary measure of COVID-19 activity, has been increasing since early July of this year, indicating a steady increase of COVID-19 activity. CDC is currently tracking a new variant called BA.2.86 which has been identified in several countries, including in the United States. The new variant has a high number of mutations which is what differentiates it from other variants, however, there is not yet enough

data to determine its transmissibility or whether it causes more severe illness compared to other variants. In the United States, as of August 30, 2023, BA.2.86 made up less than 1% of circulating SARS-CoV-2 in the previous 2 weeks and is not likely driving the current increase in activity.

In Hawaii, COVID-19 activity has been increasing statewide since early July. As of July 5, 2023, there were 71 average daily new cases which has increased to 129 average daily new cases as of September 4. Over this same time period, test positivity rates also increased from 8% to 12-15%, and the 7-day average of the number of currently hospitalized COVID-19 patients more than doubled from 48 to a peak of 112 on August 25, 2023. BA.2.86 has not yet been detected in Hawaii, so this increase does not appear to be attributable to BA.2.86 and is more likely being driven by infections with XBB lineage viruses.

Influenza

While nationally, influenza activity remains low, Hawaii is seeing increased influenza activity well ahead of the typical U.S. mainland “flu season”. Statewide influenza test positivity has increased slowly but steadily since mid-May. In the week of August 13–19, 2023, 130 out of 2,413 (5.4%) influenza specimens submitted to clinical laboratories tested positive. Subtyping of a representative selection of influenza positive clinical specimens is performed weekly at the State Laboratories Division. Recent subtyping results indicate circulation of both Influenza A (predominantly pdm[H1N1]) and B (predominantly Victoria lineage). Additional information on the epidemiology of influenza and other respiratory viruses is available in the weekly [HDOH Influenza and Respiratory Disease Surveillance Report](#).

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

While RSV is not currently circulating at high levels in Hawaii, the state experienced a substantial peak in RSV activity last year, starting in August and continuing through the fall of 2022. This peak occurred after two years of minimal RSV activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. With relaxation of COVID-19 mitigation measures, we expect to see RSV activity closer to pre-pandemic levels in the coming season.

Relative contribution of respiratory viruses to healthcare burden in Hawaii

COVID-19 currently accounts for approximately 4% of visits to emergency departments throughout the state, while influenza accounts for 1%, and RSV <0.1%. State level data on emergency department visits for these three viruses, derived from the National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP), are newly available on the [CDC website](#) and will be updated weekly.

VACCINES

New COVID-19 vaccine formulation anticipated approval and availability

The 2023–24 COVID-19 vaccine formulations, which were developed to target more recent Omicron variant strains, have not yet been authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but authorization is expected in early September. Currently, private sector pre-ordering is

available directly through COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers or third party distributors and public sector preorders will be available through [Vaccines for Children](#) and [CDC's Bridge Access Program](#) soon. Both public and private sector preorders are expected to begin shipping the day after CDC/ACIP approval is issued. Concurrently with the authorization of the 2023-24 formulations, the bivalent COVID-19 formulations are expected to be deauthorized, and providers will likely need to stop administering them. Clinical guidance, including dosing interval between previous COVID-19 illness and/or last bivalent booster and the new 2023-24 formulation, is not yet available but will be available on this site: [Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](#) after the CDC/ACIP recommendation occurs.

Influenza Vaccines

Influenza vaccines for the 2023-24 season are available now and should be offered to all persons aged ≥ 6 months who do not have contraindications. CDC's recommendations for vaccination against influenza for the 2023-2024 flu season are summarized here: [Summary of Recommendations](#). Influenza vaccine supply is robust, and no shortages are anticipated.

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Vaccine and Monoclonal Antibodies

Vaccinating older (≥ 60 years) [at-risk](#) adults now can prevent future respiratory disease including severe infections such as pneumonia. A monoclonal antibody product for prevention of RSV infections in children has been FDA approved, and recommended by the ACIP as of August 25, 2023. This product is anticipated to be available later this fall; additional recommendations to follow.

COVID-19, influenza and RSV vaccines can be administered at the same visit. Coadministration can produce common side effects, such as fever and soreness at the administration site, which may be increased if these vaccines are administered on the same day.

NON-PHARMACEUTICAL INTERVENTIONS

Encouraging patients to take precautions to prevent infection and spread of respiratory illnesses can also play a large role in reducing morbidity. Wearing well-fitting masks such as an N95 or KN95 when around others as well as practicing good hand hygiene, staying home while sick and covering coughs will reduce the spread of infection. Avoiding crowded public spaces and maximizing ventilation indoors will also help decrease transmission. Patients should be encouraged to practice these simple infection control measures with special attention paid to people at high-risk for developing severe disease or for those who spend time around high-risk individuals.

TESTING AND TREATMENT

The impacts of COVID-19 and influenza infections can be mitigated with administration of the appropriate antiviral medication. Early testing and identification of the causative virus leads to rapid administration of the appropriate anti-viral. Please consider testing all patients with respiratory infection symptoms for COVID-19 and influenza and initiating appropriate treatment.

Providers can refer to outpatient treatment recommendations for patients with [COVID-19](#) and [influenza](#).

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Laboratory confirmed COVID-19 and Influenza should be reported via electronic laboratory reporting (ELR) to the Disease Outbreak Control Division. Report clusters and outbreaks of suspected influenza, COVID-19 and other acute respiratory illness to DOCD immediately:

Oahu (Disease Reporting Line)(808) 586-4586
Maui District Health Office(808) 984-8213
Kauai District Health Office(808) 241-3563
Big Island District Health Office (Hilo)(808) 933-0912
Big Island District Health Office (Kona)(808) 322-4877
After hours on Oahu(808) 600-3625
After hours on neighbor islands(800) 360-2575 (toll free)

We appreciate your assistance in protecting the health of Hawaii's residents and visitors.

Sincerely,



Sarah K. Kemble, MD
State Epidemiologist

Additional resources:

HDOH Hawaii COVID-19 Data: <https://health.hawaii.gov/coronavirusdisease2019/current-situation-in-hawaii/>

CDC COVID Variant Updates: <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/covid-19-variant-update-2023-08-30.html>

HDOH Influenza and Respiratory Disease Surveillance Report:

<https://health.hawaii.gov/docd/resources/reports/influenza-reports/>

National Emergency Department Visits for COVID-19, Influenza, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncird/surveillance/respiratory-illnesses/index.html>

COVID-19 Vaccine Recommendations: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html>

Flu Vaccine Recommendations for 2023-24:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/acip/summary/summary-recommendations.htm>

RSV Immunization Recommendations:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/rsv/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/rsv/hcp/older-adults.html>

Outpatient treatment guidelines for COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-care/outpatient-treatment-overview.html>

Outpatient treatment guidelines for influenza:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/summary-clinicians.htm>