

Health experts urge vaccinations as respiratory virus season begins

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**RISK LESS.
DO MORE.**
Get this season's vaccines



As the 2024-2025 respiratory virus season gets under way, statewide infectious disease experts urge everyone in Oregon to Risk Less. Do More. in alignment with a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) national vaccination campaign.

Risk Less. Do More. aims to increase awareness of vaccines that reduce serious illness from influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in high-risk populations and to limit the spread of these viruses.

“These immunizations act as our best defense against severe disease which can affect anyone,” Oregon Health Authority (OHA) Medical Director for Respiratory Viral Pathogens and M.D. Melissa Sutton, said.

Sutton, Sarah Laiosa, D.O., public health officer for Malheur and Harney counties and Richard Bruno, M.D., health officer for Multnomah County – [speaking to reporters during a virtual media briefing today](#) – said RSV is the most common cause of hospitalization among infants in the United States, with up to 3% of all infants younger than 6 months hospitalized each year. Most of these infants, he said, have no underlying medical conditions. Similarly, about half of children hospitalized with COVID-19 have no underlying medical conditions.

“As a physician, I care for patients with these infections in the community, as well as patients who require hospitalization. And I know that many people in Oregon have questions about vaccines. It is important that

people seek information directly from a health care provider they trust before deciding what is best for them,” Laiosa said.

The physicians also reminded people at increased risk of severe COVID-19 infection and influenza to talk to their health care provider about what to do if they get sick.

People at increased risk for severe COVID-19 infection include older adults, pregnant women and those with underlying medical conditions. People at increased risk for severe influenza infection include those same groups, as well as children younger than 5. [\[read all of the health experts talking points here\]](#)

“Compared with other states, we have among the lowest number of hospital beds per person in the nation. That means that any increase in respiratory diseases can quickly fill our emergency rooms and hospitals, slowing care for all and putting incredible pressure on our dedicated frontline healthcare workers,” Laiosa said.

“Specifically, in rural areas like mine, access to care can include additional challenges such as extreme weather events, prolonged road closures, long distances to the nearest health care provider and limited emergency medical resources. Preventing severe illness through vaccines and early treatment is essential,” she added.

In addition to recommending vaccinations, Bruno explained that Oregon is experiencing measles and pertussis outbreaks. Vaccines for both diseases are widely available and free to all children through the Vaccines for Children program.

“There have been 31 measles cases reported during the current outbreak—Oregon’s highest number of cases since 1991,” Bruno said. “All cases have occurred in unvaccinated people and two have developed severe disease requiring hospitalization. The good news is that the most recent measles case was confirmed in mid-August and we may be nearing the end of this outbreak.”

“Oregon has fallen below the 95% threshold for herd immunity in school-age children,” Bruno said. During the 2023-24 school year, he said, only 91.2% of kindergartners in Oregon were fully vaccinated against measles.

OHA is urging health care providers to use the [Risk Less. Do More.](#) campaign, which offers a range of resources to share with patients, including handouts, digital banners for websites and social media messages. The agency is calling on all providers to order and offer immunizations to all eligible patients at each visit. And, they should familiarize themselves with COVID-19 and influenza antiviral treatments, which, like immunizations, reduce the risk of severe disease.

People can get the COVID-19 and influenza vaccines by contacting their health plan, health care provider, county public health clinic or a federally qualified health center (FQHC). Oregonians can also search for a clinic by ZIP code at vaccinefinder.org, by calling 211 or visiting 211info.org.

