

News

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With Respiratory Viruses Circulating, 12 Bay Area Health Officials Recommend Actions to Stay Healthy for the Holidays

This holiday season, another surge in COVID infections, along with high levels of influenza (flu) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), are straining healthcare systems and impacting families.

The good news is that there are easy actions everyone can take to stay healthy this season. Twelve Bay Area health officers recommend the following steps:

Get Vaccinated Against Flu and COVID.

- The updated Omicron COVID booster, also known as the bivalent booster, targets the Omicron variant, as well as the original 2019 virus. The Omicron boosters are available for ages six months and older. These improved vaccines are the best protection against severe symptoms of COVID and hospitalization.
- Earlier in the pandemic, COVID vaccination rates in the Bay Area were high, shielding some communities from the worst outcomes. This vaccine protection has decreased over time, but an Omicron COVID booster can rebuild it. In most parts of the Bay Area, less than half of eligible people have received the updated Omicron COVID booster.
- More people in the Bay Area are getting the flu this year than earlier in the pandemic. Flu is not the same as the common cold and can lead to sudden, severe illness in the very young, seniors, and those with underlying medical conditions.
- Now is the time to get your flu shot. Your doctor can give you the flu shot and the Omicron COVID booster in the same visit. COVID shots are free and other recommended immunizations are widely available at low or no cost.
- There is no vaccine for RSV, but simple measures like regular hand washing and covering coughs can help.

Stay Home if You Are Sick.

- No matter which virus you have, if you are feeling sick the best way to keep from spreading it to others is to stay home until you have recovered. If you think it might be COVID, get tested.
- People who need urgent or emergency medical care, including testing or treatment for influenza or COVID, should seek it.

Wear a Mask in Indoor Public Places.

- Masks can prevent transmission of COVID, flu, RSV, and other respiratory viruses all at once.
- Wearing a high-quality mask, such as a KN94, KN95 or N95, can prevent you from getting sick and missing out on life, work, school, and holiday parties. Masking is strongly recommended indoors in public settings to prevent the spread of viruses and reduce the risk of illness.

- Masks also lower the likelihood that you pass on an infection if you are already sick, even if your symptoms are mild. This helps protect people around you, especially those at higher risk of serious illness.
- Improve ventilation indoors by turning on HVAC systems, filtering the air with a portable HEPA filter, pointing fans out open windows, or opening doors and windows when possible. These can all help viruses from spreading indoors.

Get Tested Before an Indoor Gathering or if You Feel Sick.

- Reduce the chances of infecting someone else with COVID by finding out if you have the virus before gathering with others. Remember, COVID symptoms may be mild or absent. Make sure to stock up on home test kits.

Get Treatment, if Needed.

- Free treatments are available if you test positive for COVID. Free medication prevents hospitalization and is available to most adults and some teens with even mild symptoms.
- Talk to your doctor about treatment options or visit covid19.ca.gov/treatment or find a test to treat location near you: aspr.hhs.gov/TestToTreat. Treatments work best when started right after symptoms begin, and within 5 days of symptoms starting.

Health Officers from the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, San Mateo, Solano, Sonoma, and the city of Berkeley encourage the public to take these easy steps to protect themselves and others from missing holiday moments and to ease the burden on local health systems. Across the Bay Area, respiratory viruses impact the most vulnerable, including young children, the immunocompromised, people living in crowded housing or congregate living facilities, and seniors, especially at skilled nursing facilities.

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