



Pennsylvania
Department of Health



Pennsylvania
Department of Aging

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Shapiro Administration Encourages Pennsylvanians to Get Respiratory Virus Vaccinations Ahead of the Holiday Season

Taylor, PA – Leaders from the **Pennsylvania Departments of Health (DOH)** and **Aging** visited the Taylor Community Center in Lackawanna County today to encourage all Pennsylvanians to stay up to date on their annual vaccinations to protect against flu, COVID-19, and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) heading into the holiday season.

“Before the holiday season begins, Pennsylvanians should protect themselves and their family from severe respiratory illness by ensuring they are up to date on their flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccinations,” said **Secretary of Health Dr. Debra Bogen**, who received a flu shot during her visit to the Taylor Community Center. “I’m encouraging all Pennsylvanians to be proactive by getting their vaccines now to increase the likelihood of healthy get-togethers with family and friends over the holidays.”

Since the start of the respiratory virus season on September 29, emergency department visits resulting in a flu, COVID-19, or RSV diagnosis have remained low; to help these numbers remain low, Pennsylvanians should get vaccinated against respiratory viruses. During the [current respiratory virus season](#), the DOH has recorded 1,083 laboratory-confirmed flu cases and three deaths; 96 COVID-19-related deaths; and 470 confirmed RSV cases.

“With the cold weather and the holiday season just around the corner, it is the perfect time for older adults to get their yearly vaccinations,” said **Secretary of Aging Jason Kavulich**. “These vital immunizations are available just about everywhere, at your local pharmacies, health care providers, and events like the one here at the Taylor Community Center. Getting vaccinated can provide peace of mind for older adults and their loved ones so they can share special moments in their homes and communities.”

Most insurance plans cover COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccinations at no cost, but for people who are underinsured or uninsured, the COVID-19 vaccine is available through local [State Health Centers](#) and [Federally Qualified Health Centers](#). For children who qualify, COVID-19, flu vaccines, and other routine childhood immunizations are available at no cost through the [Vaccines for Children \(VFC\) Program](#).

The flu and COVID-19 vaccinations are regularly updated to protect against current virus variants. Health care providers recommend these vaccinations for people six months and older. Vaccinations are especially important for high-risk groups including people 65 and older, people with certain medical conditions, and those at a higher risk of developing complications from respiratory illness.

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that individuals aged 65 and older, as well as people who are moderately or severely immunocompromised, receive a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine six months after their initial dose of the updated vaccine.

Individuals with weakened immune systems may also receive additional doses based on shared decision-making with health care providers. Ongoing vaccination is crucial for reducing severe illness and minimizing the risk of long-term COVID-19.

For the second year in a row, a vaccine for RSV is available for residents 60 and older or women in their third trimester of pregnancy. Residents interested in getting vaccinated for RSV should contact their health care provider to determine eligibility and availability. An RSV immunization is also available to protect newborns and infants in their first winter season.

Respiratory viruses share similar symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, a runny or stuffy nose, headaches, body aches, chills, and fatigue.

For residents at higher risk for more severe illness due to age or health status, it is recommended that they visit a health care provider and get tested early to be eligible for antiviral medications. These medications are available for the flu, COVID-19, and RSV. If started early in the illness course, these medications ease symptoms, shorten the length of a viral infection, and reduce the risk of severe health outcomes.

For more information and to find a nearby vaccination location, visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

The Pennsylvania Department of Health provides weekly updates throughout the respiratory virus season on its [respiratory virus dashboard](#) to keep residents informed.

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