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Hawai'i respiratory virus rates rise early in season

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health is reporting that cases of Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and influenza are increasing in Hawai'i, in line with trends observed across the country.

RSV is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in a week or two, but children under the age of five, and in particular infants, are at highest risk for severe RSV infections. Older adults, especially those with underlying medical conditions, can also experience severe illness.

"Many respiratory viruses are circulating in our community, including RSV, COVID-19, and influenza," said State Epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Kemble. "We urge all eligible individuals to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza and take simple preventive measures that stop the spread of respiratory viruses."

In 2020 and 2021, RSV and influenza cases declined sharply, as COVID-19 mitigation measures also prevented the spread of these viruses. Since these measures were relaxed, RSV cases have been rising.

RSV cases typically increase in the fall and peak in winter. This year's total testing volume (positive and negative tests) and percent positivity are both increasing quickly early in the season. Out of an average of 1,858 RSV tests performed per week statewide in recent weeks, 23% were positive. This indicates there is a high level of both detected and undetected RSV infection in the community.

Influenza activity in Hawai'i remains low but is increasing. Out of 3,886 specimens tested for influenza statewide in the week of October 16–22, 5.8% were positive. During a similar timeframe, statewide COVID-19 test positivity was 6.4% out of 14,927 tests performed. COVID-19 test positivity declined to 5.3% in the current week.

People concerned about the flu or other respiratory viruses can take simple preventive measures like staying away from others who are sick, staying home if they're sick, washing their hands, covering their cough, and wearing a mask.

DOH recommends flu shots for individuals six months and older. COVID-19 vaccinations are recommended for everyone six months and older and COVID-19 bivalent boosters are recommended for everyone age five and older.

COVID-19 vaccinations and bivalent boosters can be scheduled through providers found at [HawaiiCOVID19.com/vaccine](https://hawaiiCOVID19.com/vaccine). Many providers and pharmacies allow the scheduling of flu shots when scheduling your COVID-19 vaccines or boosters.

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