The state of flu, RSV, and COVID-19: Suggested talking points

- **Flu and RSV cases continue to fill hospitals, including pediatric ones.**
  - This year’s flu and RSV seasons began earlier than usual and have been hitting young kids particularly hard.
  - Flu activity across the nation remains high, with 28 states as well as Washington, D.C., New York City, and Puerto Rico recording “very high” spread.
  - RSV cases may be peaking, as they have dropped from around 18,000 during the first week of November to around 7,000 in the week ending November 26.
  - Nationwide COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are recording slight upticks as Omicron subvariants BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 become the dominant U.S. variants.

- **Flu, RSV, and COVID-19 share many symptoms and can each cause severe illness.**
  - A runny or stuffy nose, cough, or sore throat can be symptoms of any of the three viruses.
  - Flu is often characterized by a sudden onset of symptoms, especially a high fever.
  - A loss of taste or smell is most commonly associated with COVID-19.
  - RSV is similar to a common cold for most people, but it can cause severe symptoms like fever and wheezing among young kids and older adults.
  - You can test for COVID-19 at home using a rapid test, but the only way to know for sure if you have RSV or the flu is to go to the doctor and get tested.

- **Vaccines and treatments can keep you and your family safe.**
  - Get your flu shot and COVID-19 booster now in order to be protected for the winter holidays.
  - It is safe to get both the flu and COVID-19 shots in one appointment. Make an appointment at your local CVS or Walgreens, or use this locator to find a vaccination site near you.
  - Ask your doctor for Paxlovid if you get infected with COVID-19, are age 12 or older, and are at higher risk of developing severe symptoms. Paxlovid significantly reduces the risk of hospitalization or death from COVID-19, but it must be taken within five days of the onset of symptoms.
  - Ask your doctor for Tamiflu or other approved treatments to reduce the length of flu symptoms.
  - There are no vaccines or specific treatments for RSV, but you can prevent infection by washing your hands and wearing a mask in high-risk situations.
  - Keep infants safe from these viruses by limiting close contact, especially with strangers.
The state of flu, RSV, and COVID-19: Frequently asked questions

1. How can I distinguish between flu, RSV, and COVID-19 symptoms?

These three respiratory viruses share many symptoms, including a runny or stuffy nose, cough, and sore throat. The best way to determine which virus you have is to get tested. You can test for COVID-19 at home using a rapid test, but you’ll need to see a doctor for a flu or RSV test. Still, there are some tell-tale signs for each of these infections. A flu infection can be distinguished from RSV and COVID-19 by its sudden onset of symptoms, which often include a high fever. A loss of taste or smell is most commonly associated with COVID-19. RSV is similar to a common cold for most people, but it can cause severe symptoms like fever and wheezing among young kids and older adults.

2. Are these viruses spreading where I live?

Flu activity is high in most states across the country. You can use this map to check the level of flu activity in your state. RSV is also widespread across regions, but the South is now recording a downward trend in cases. You can check on your state’s specific RSV case trends here. As for COVID-19, the Southwest is of the most concern, with several counties in the region recording a rise in cases and/or hospitalizations. You can check how your county is doing with this New York Times tracker and the CDC Community Levels tool.

3. How can I protect myself and my family against flu, RSV, and COVID-19?

The best way to protect yourself and your family is to get everyone who is eligible vaccinated. Everyone 6 months and older can get a flu shot, and everyone 5 years and older can get a COVID-19 booster. Anyone who hasn’t gotten their primary COVID-19 vaccination series yet—including kids as young as 6 months old—should get their first shot as soon as possible. Getting these vaccines now will ensure that you are protected in time for the winter holidays.

Knowing what treatments are available if you do get infected can also decrease the risk of serious illness. Paxlovid can significantly reduce the chance of hospitalization or death from COVID-19, while Tamiflu and other approved treatments can help reduce the length of flu symptoms.

Since there are no vaccines or specific treatments for RSV, taking precautions like staying home when sick, washing your hands, and wearing a mask in high-risk situations can make a big difference. It’s also key to protect infants and young children—who are at high risk of severe symptoms from RSV—by limiting their close contact with others, especially strangers.