A winter surge has begun: Suggested talking points

- **We are facing a “tripledemic” of COVID-19, flu, and RSV.**
  - Young kids and older adults are among the groups that have been severely impacted by respiratory illnesses this season.
  - COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths **are all rising** significantly nationwide, with nearly half of counties now at the “medium” or “high” community level. Hospitalization rates saw the sharpest spike among people 70 and older.
  - Flu activity **continues to be “very high”** in 26 states and has resulted in at least 30 pediatric deaths so far this season.
  - RSV cases remain high but are in decline across all regions.

- **Everyone 6 months and older who is eligible should get their flu shot and Omicron vaccine.**
  - No vaccine is 100 percent effective, but they are a crucial layer of protection against infection and especially against severe illness.
  - The FDA and CDC **expanded use** of bivalent COVID-19 boosters, which are designed to provide broad protection against COVID-19 as well as provide protection against two specific variants of COVID-19, to children as young as 6 months.
  - Kids under 6 years who got Moderna’s primary series can get Moderna’s bivalent booster two months after their last shot.
  - Kids under 5 years who started but have not yet completed Pfizer’s three-shot primary series can get Pfizer’s bivalent vaccine for their third shot. Kids under 5 who have already completed Pfizer’s primary series are not yet eligible for a booster (fourth shot).
  - It is safe to get a flu shot and COVID-19 vaccine or booster at the same time.

- **It’s time to wear high-quality, well-fitting masks in public again.**
  - Last week, the CDC director **encouraged** people to wear “high-quality, well-fitting masks” to protect against respiratory illnesses this holiday season.
  - New York City and Los Angeles County have also reissued their indoor masking recommendations.
  - N95 and KN95 masks provide the highest level of protection against respiratory illnesses and can significantly reduce COVID-19 transmission in schools and at the community level.
  - You may be able to find **free N95 masks** at local pharmacies and community centers.
A winter surge has begun: Frequently asked questions

1. How severe is the current COVID-19 surge?

COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are all rising significantly nationwide, with hospitalization rates seeing the sharpest spike among people 70 and older. COVID-19 community levels, a CDC measurement of community transmission, are "medium" or "high" in nearly half of U.S. counties. Compared to previous waves, the current surge is relatively mild, though it’s important to note that there is a severe underreporting of cases due to at-home testing and the closure of testing centers across the country. It’s yet to be seen whether the recent upticks will turn out to be temporary or indicate the start of a substantial winter surge.

2. How is this winter different from previous pandemic winters?

COVID-19 is not the only respiratory illness of concern this winter. Flu and RSV have been filling hospitals, especially children’s hospitals, over the past few months. These two non-COVID-19 viruses have reappeared in full strength after two years of milder seasons. With COVID-19, flu, and RSV now in circulation at the same time, the U.S. is in the middle of a "tripledemic" that has severely impacted young kids and older adults. Take extra precautions this winter to stay protected against all three viruses.

3. How can I protect myself and my family?

The best way to stay protected this winter is to use as many layers of protection as possible. Vaccines and boosters are crucial. Flu shots and bivalent COVID-19 vaccines are available to kids as young as 6 months old. High-quality, well-fitting masks are also key. They can significantly reduce COVID-19 transmission in schools and at the community level. Washing your hands and using ventilation and filtration tools at social gatherings will also decrease your chance of getting infected and limit transmission.