



## Putting this winter's surge in context: Suggested talking points

- **Previous winter surges should not be our frame of reference.**
  - COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths have been [much lower this winter](#) compared to previous pandemic winters. But by labeling this winter's surge as "mild," we run the risk of believing this level of disease is acceptable.
  - This winter, hospitalizations among older adults spiked dramatically. Children's hospitals were overwhelmed by flu, RSV, and COVID-19 cases. And on average, more than 400 people are dying of COVID-19 each day.
  - We could be in a much better place than we currently are, especially with tools like bivalent boosters, high-quality masks, and Paxlovid available.
- **The COVID-19 virus remains unpredictable.**
  - It's a good sign that we haven't had a major new variant since the original Omicron lineage, but the COVID-19 virus is still unpredictable and not exactly "like the flu" yet.
  - XBB.1.5, the dominant COVID-19 strain in the U.S. now, is the most transmissible strain yet and is resistant to many of our existing drugs and treatments.
  - More COVID-19 spread means more chances for the virus to mutate, which is one reason why we need to keep limiting transmission.
  - Just like it's important to take it easy while healing from an illness (even if you're already feeling better), it's important to continue taking precautions at this stage of the pandemic for everyone's health and safety.
- **Booster uptake among older adults needs to be higher.**
  - Bivalent booster uptake has been rising slowly among people ages 65 and older, but it needs to be higher than the [current 40 percent](#) to protect a group that is particularly vulnerable to severe illness.
  - Staying up to date on vaccines is key because boosters strengthen our immune systems against current circulating COVID-19 strains.
  - For older adults, immunocompromised individuals, and people with underlying medical issues, bivalent boosters are especially important because they help lower the risk of severe disease and hospitalization.



## Putting this winter's surge in context: Frequently asked questions

### 1. How does this COVID-19 winter compare to previous ones?

COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths all peaked at lower levels this winter compared to previous pandemic winters. But it's not very informative to use previous winter surges as our frame of reference. We didn't face a major new variant this winter, and we now have tools like bivalent boosters and Paxlovid to fight severe disease—it's expected that we should be in a much better position than before. However, this winter was still characterized by a dramatic spike in hospitalizations among older adults and hundreds of daily COVID-19 deaths. By labeling this winter's surge as "mild," we run the risk of believing this level of disease is acceptable. In reality, we could be in a much better position than we currently are.

### 2. What precautions should I take at this point of the pandemic?

Just like it's important to take it easy while healing from an illness (even if you're already feeling better), it's important to continue taking precautions at this stage of the pandemic. One of the most impactful actions you can take is to get the bivalent booster, especially if you are an older adult, immunocompromised, or have [underlying medical issues](#). Staying up to date on vaccines is key to a smooth pandemic recovery because [boosters strengthen our immune systems](#) against current circulating COVID-19 strains. You should also take actions to help limit transmission, as more COVID-19 spread means more chances for the virus to mutate.

### 3. How will the end of COVID-19 emergencies affect me?

After the [COVID-19 emergencies end in May](#), COVID-19 vaccines will continue to be free if you have health insurance. Free at-home tests will not be as widely available, and COVID-19 treatments will also no longer be covered by the government. If you are currently on Medicaid, you should also be aware of the fact that Medicaid eligibility checks will resume on April 1. Make sure your mailing address and contact information are up to date so that you can be notified of any changes to your coverage. If you do receive a Medicaid termination notice, know that you have the right to appeal. Reach out to your state Medicaid agency if you have questions about continuing your coverage.