

HEALTH MATTERS



Promoting better health for a stronger community



HEALTH EXPERTS are concerned by indications of an early flu season at the same time RSV cases are on the rise.

Signs suggest early flu season ahead

After two years of little flu activity, health officials say they see signs of an early flu season that may be exacerbated by relaxed COVID-19 prevention measures.

For the 2022-23 flu season, there are three flu vaccines that are currently available for people 65 years and older, according to the CDC.

People at higher risk of flu complications include those who are 65 and older, people with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart or lung disease, younger children and pregnant women.

“The single best way to reduce the risk of the flu and complications is to get vaccinated,” said Island County Public Health nurse

See **FLU**, page 2

Island schools see an uptick in RSV cases

Some Island County schools are starting to see an uptick in respiratory viruses. Nationally, there is an increase in cases of RSV, or Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection, a disease which can be dangerous for some

See **RSV**, page 3



FLU: *October best month to get vaccine*

Continued from page 1

Melanie Davis, RN, BSN. “Everyone 6 months of age and older should get the flu vaccine.”

There are different flu vaccines licensed and recommended in the U.S. If you have questions about which vaccine is best for you, check with your health care provider to ensure you are getting the best flu vaccine for you.

Flu vaccine is not recommended for people with severe, life-threatening allergies to any ingredient in a flu vaccine (other than egg proteins), according to the CDC. If you have an allergy to eggs or any other vaccine ingredients, or have had an allergic reaction in the past, talk to your doctor or other qualified health provider to discuss options.

Flu vaccination offers a number of benefits, including preventing getting sick with flu, decreasing disease severity, reducing risk of flu-associated hospitalizations, and preventing complications for people with certain chronic health conditions.

Flu vaccination is also associated with lower rates of some cardiac events, and can reduce the risk of worsening chronic lung disease and diabetes, according to the CDC.

The suggested timing for getting a vaccination is similar to last season, according to the CDC’s website.

“It’s recommended to get your flu vaccine by the end of October before the peak flu season hits, but anytime after that is beneficial and encouraged,” Davis said. “Getting the flu vaccine decreases the likeliness of seeking medical attention for the flu by 40-60%.”

Vaccination in July and August is not recommended for most adults but can be considered for some groups, the CDC said on its website.

Getting vaccinated after October can provide continued protection during the peak of flu season, the CDC said, not-

ing that most of the time flu activity peaks between December and February, although significant activity can last as late as May.

The state Department of Health reported “minimal” flu activity in Washington as of last week, according to Jamie Hamilton, an epidemiologist for Island County Public Health COVID Response.

In other states, however, from Texas and to the east, cases of flu are on the rise. The District of Columbia was reporting “very high” flu activity as of last week.

“This increased activity could signal an early start to flu season,” the CDC said on Oct. 14.

The United States has experienced little flu for the past two seasons, the CDC said. “Reduced population immunity, particularly among young children who may never have had flu exposure or been vaccinated, could bring about a robust return of flu.”

CDC officials said they are particularly concerned about drops in flu vaccine coverage in the past two years among higher risk groups, including children and pregnant people.

Last week, the CDC reported three new pediatric deaths for the prior (2021-22) flu season, bringing the season total to 43 pediatric deaths. This report further underscores the importance of vaccination among children.

During most years, about 80% of pediatric flu deaths happen in children who have not been fully vaccinated, the CDC added.

Talk to your healthcare provider today to get the flu vaccine to protect yourself and others this season or visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) and enter your zip code to find a flu vaccine near you.

More than 105 million doses of flu vaccine have been distributed in the United States at this time, the CDC reported.

RSV: Steps to help keep children healthy

Continued from page 1

infants and young children.

“Our primary school nurse has definitely noticed an increase,” said one South Whidbey School District nursing staff member. “She and our attendance secretary are trying to figure out a way to quantify it.”

“Specifically, when we compare this back-to-school season with one prior to COVID, we see nearly double the number of illness-related absences,” the staffer added.

For the South Whidbey district, during the first 36 days of school this year, medical-related absences have totaled 1,310 – excluding COVID-related absences.

In comparison, during the first 36 days of school last year, there were 698 illness-related absences.

School nursing staff in Coupeville reported last week they are also seeing a wave of respiratory colds circulating across different campuses.

A person infected with RSV can infect others with a cough or sneeze. If the respiratory droplets land on a surface like a doorknob or desk and someone else touches it and then touches their face, they can get sick.

Each year in the United States, an estimated 58,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized due to RSV infection. Those at greatest risk for severe illness from RSV include:

- Premature infants;
- Very young infants, especially those 6 months and younger;
- Children younger than 2 with chronic lung disease or congenital (present from birth) heart disease;
- Children with weakened immune systems, and;
- Children who have neuromuscular disorders, including those who have difficulty swallowing or clearing mucus secretions.

Virtually all children get an RSV infection by the time they are age 2, according to the CDC’s website. Most of the time RSV will cause a mild, cold-like illness, but it can also cause severe illness such as bronchiolitis

(inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs).

One to two out of every 100 children younger than 6 months of age with RSV infection may need to be hospitalized, according to the CDC. Those who are hospitalized may require oxygen, intubation, and/or mechanical ventilation (help with breathing). Most improve with this type of supportive care and are discharged in a few days.

RSV may not be severe when it first starts. However, it can become more severe a few days into the illness. Early symptoms of RSV may include a runny nose, decrease in appetite and cough.

Infants who get an RSV infection almost always show symptoms. This is different from adults who can sometimes get RSV infections and not have symptoms.

In very young infants (less than 6 months old), the only symptoms of RSV infection may be irritability, decreased activity, decreased appetite and apnea (pauses while breathing).

Fever may not always occur with RSV infections.

RSV season occurs each year in most regions of the U.S. during fall, winter, and spring.

Island County Public Health officials recommend that you take extra care to keep infants and young children healthy by doing the following:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Washing your hands will help protect you from germs.
- Keep your hands off your face. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Germs spread this way.
- Avoid close contact, such as kissing, and sharing cups or eating utensils with people who have cold-



like symptoms.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash afterward.

- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that people frequently touch, such as toys, doorknobs, and mobile devices. When people infected with RSV touch surfaces and objects, they can leave behind germs. Also, when they cough or sneeze, droplets containing germs can land on surfaces and objects.

- If possible, stay home from work, school, and public areas when you are sick. This will help protect others from catching your illness. If you have to leave home, wear an N95 mask around others.

- Call your healthcare provider if you or your child is having difficulty breathing, not drinking enough fluids, or experiencing worsening symptoms.

There is no vaccine yet to prevent RSV infection, but scientists are working hard to develop one, according to the CDC.

If you are concerned about your child’s risk for severe RSV infection, talk to your child’s healthcare provider.



Maintain a strong immune system for cold, flu season

By Shawn Morris, ND

Island County Public Health

Day in and day out, our immune systems do an incredible job fighting off germs that can make us sick. The immune system is a complex network of defensive cells, proteins and other compounds found in our skin, digestive system, bloodstream, lymph and other areas of the body. For optimal function, we need balance and good communication between the complex parts of our immune system.



Morris

“There is still much that researchers don’t know about the intricacies and interconnectedness of the immune response,” according to Harvard Health.

Researchers are looking closely at the impact of lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, sleep, and stress on immunity.

“Following general good-health

guidelines is the single best step you can take toward naturally keeping your immune system working properly,” Harvard Health concluded.

According to the CDC, healthy habits can help our immune system fend off environmental stressors and germs, and include the following practices:

- Avoiding smoking;
- Drinking alcohol in moderation (1 drink per day when consuming alcohol);
- Eating a diet high in fruits and vegetables;
- Staying hydrated;
- Getting regular exercise;
- Creating healthy sleep patterns;
- Practicing hygiene like regularly washing your hands;
- Taking steps to balance stress and care for mental health, and;
- Staying current with health check-ups and immunizations - including vaccination for COVID-19 and flu.

Healthy eating and immune function

Eating patterns that focus on a variety of nutritious foods and limit

highly processed and sugary foods help balance inflammation for better health.

According to Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-25, a healthy eating plan includes the following:

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products;
- Includes a variety of protein foods such as seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), soy products, nuts, and seeds;
- Is low in [added sugars](#), [sodium](#), saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol, and;
- Stays within your daily calorie needs.

Drinking plenty of water supports good health. To add variety, mix in a splash of fruit juice, a lemon wedge, or try sparkling water. Limit sugar-sweetened drinks like soda and energy drinks. Find more healthy hydration tips from the CDC [here](#).

USDA’s [MyPlate Plan](#) can help you identify what and how much to eat from the different food groups while staying within a healthy calorie range.

See **MORRIS**, page 5

MORRIS:

Keeping your immune system healthy, strong

Continued from page 4

If you're under the weather, focusing on the above eating tips along with tried-and-true approaches such as chicken soup and hot tea may help.

"I have to say, when I have patients that are sick, I often ask them to sip hot tea," said Dr. Edward Damrose, chief of laryngology at Stanford Health Care. "But I'm not sure that it's the tea itself that has the beneficial property, or that the warm water cuts through the phlegm and makes patients feel good."

There is growing evidence that deficiencies in micronutrients, including zinc, folic acid, and vitamins A, B6, C, D and E, can impair immune function, according to Harvard Health. These micronutrients all play important roles in the immune system. Getting a variety of fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and healthy fats and proteins provides a rich source of micronutrients. If you're concerned about nutrient intake, schedule time with your health-care provider to discuss.

Current research is also pointing to links between gut microbes and immune health.

In 2021, an international team of researchers led by Harvard Medical School discovered that diet affects immunity via the gut microbiome, with findings published in the journal *Nature*.

Researchers found a complex pathway between foods, cell signaling, gut bacteria, and immune cell activation. Balanced eating supports a healthy microbiome by providing fiber to helpful gut bacteria, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine.

Impact of stress

When it comes to health, not all kinds of stress have the same effect. In daily life, we all encounter some normal level of stress that can have a beneficial effect, known as eustress.

For example, feeling stressed about an upcoming exam, while also feeling



well prepared to take on the challenge, can lead to a positive sense of accomplishment. On the other hand, chronic stress that leaves us feeling depleted and defeated, known as distress, can impact physical health.

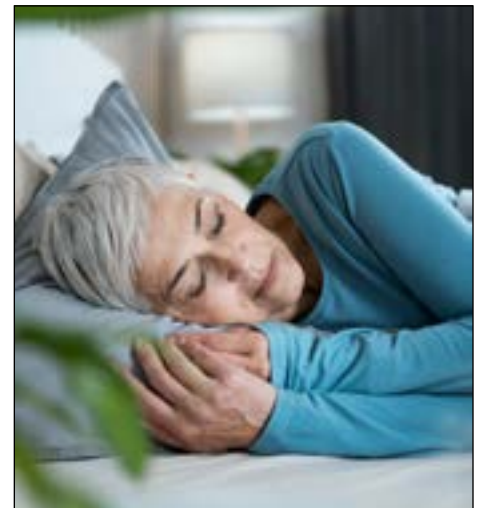
A chronic stress response appears to weaken the immune system, making it more likely to catch a cold, according to Harvard Health. Below are evidence-based ways to help yourself and others manage stress in a healthy way, as recommended by the CDC. For immediate help, 911 or the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline are available 24/7.

- Take breaks from news stories, including those on social media. It's good to be informed, but constant information can be upsetting. Consider limiting news to just a couple times a day and disconnecting from phone, TV, and computer screens for a while.

- Going to bed at the same time each night and getting up at the same time each morning, including on the weekends, can help you [sleep better](#).

- Move more and sit less. Every little bit of physical activity helps. You can start small and build up to 150 minutes a week that can be broken down to smaller amounts such as 20 to 30 minutes a day.

- Take deep breaths and stretch throughout the day. Consider trying this belly breathing practice from Harvard Health: Take a deep breath slowly through your nose, feeling your chest



and lower belly rise. Let your abdomen expand fully. Then breathe out slowly. Repeat two to three times and throughout the day as needed.

- Make time for creative outlets. Try to make time for activities you enjoy or take up a new hobby. Search for classes and workshops offered locally. [Macaroni Kid](#) shares local family events and fun activities.

- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

Sleep benefits

Sleep is our time to rest and repair. During sleep, the immune system regulates proteins called cytokines and

See **BENEFITS**, page 9

Updated booster available for ages 5+

Health care providers and pharmacies in Island County and across Washington are now offering bivalent booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines to people 5 years of age and older.

“This is another step toward a healthier future for everyone in Washington state,” said Dr. Umair A. Shah, state secretary of Health and master of Public Health.

“The more people who qualify for the COVID-19 booster shot, the better protection we can offer our communities,” he said.

Expansion of eligibility to be vaccinated with the booster follows the distribution last month of the updated (bivalent) COVID-19 vaccine, which specifically targets the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants that currently make up the majority of COVID-19 cases nationwide.

DOH urges everyone 5 and older to prioritize getting vaccinated with this

updated COVID-19 booster as cold and flu season approaches.

“We are entering respiratory disease season and it is a key time to protect their health and that of those around them from the flu,” said Shah.

DOH’s new COVID-19 recommendations for booster doses are as follows:

- People 5 years of age and older who have completed the primary vaccine series can be vaccinated with the Pfizer bivalent booster at least two months after their most recent dose.
- People 6 years of age and older who have completed the primary vaccine series can be vaccinated with Moderna’s bivalent booster at least two months after their most recent dose.

Regardless of what coverage you have, or whether you have coverage at all, COVID-19 vaccines are free to anyone who wants one.

Contact your health care provider or check the websites for local pharmacies

to see which booster doses are available and if appointments are required or walk-ins are allowed.

There is no change in eligibility for children 6 months through 4 years of age to complete the primary series of monovalent COVID-19 vaccines from both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and they are not currently authorized to take any COVID-19 booster doses.

DOH officials asks that the public remain patient as initial demand for bivalent vaccines is expected to be greater than available inventory during the first weeks of availability.

To make an appointment for a vaccine or booster dose, visit [VaccinateWA.org](https://www.wa.gov/vaccinate) or call the COVID-19 Information Hotline at 833-VAX-HELP. Language assistance is available.

Those with more questions may check out DOH’s [COVID-19 vaccine FAQ website](#) or talk to their trusted health care provider.





Update Your COVID-19 Vaccination Protection

COVID vaccines continue to work very well at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

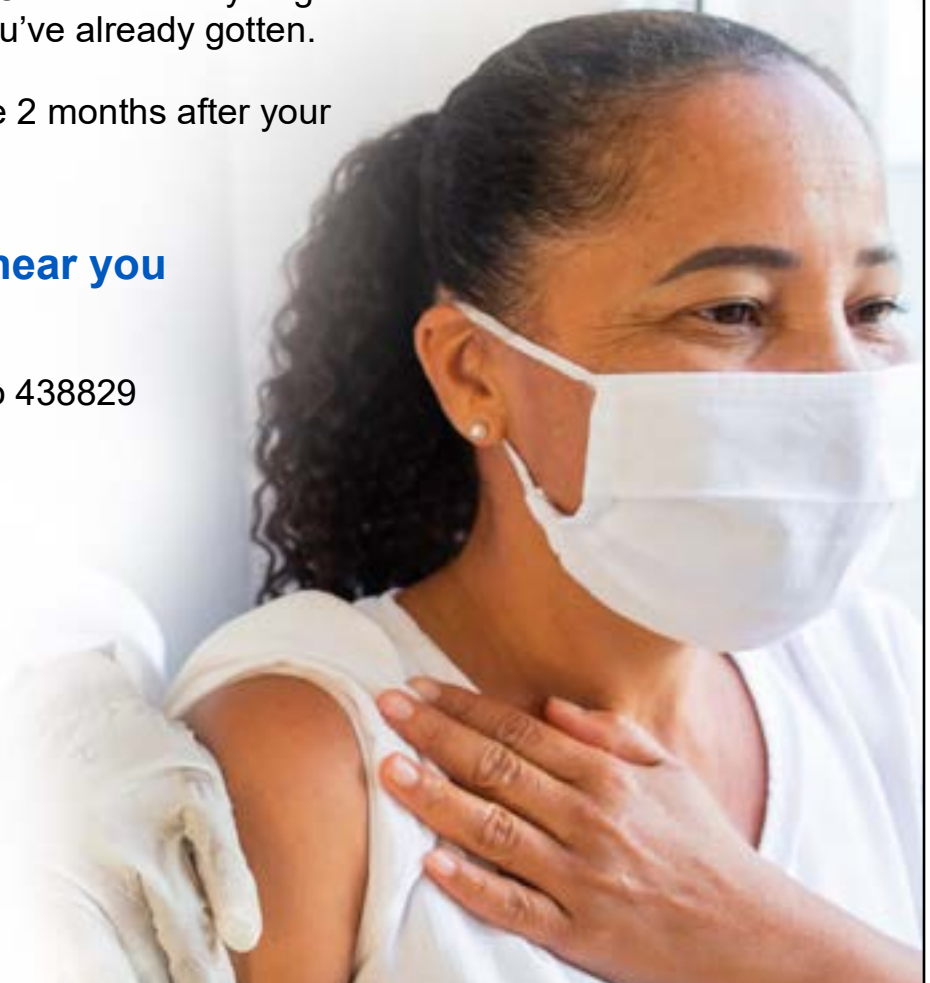
Updated COVID vaccines are here for everyone 5 or older to help protect against Omicron.

It doesn't matter which COVID vaccine you got or how many boosters you've already gotten.

Get your updated vaccine 2 months after your last dose.

Find free vaccines near you

- Visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov)
- Text your ZIP code to 438829
- Call 1-800-232-0233
- Scan the QR code





DONATING BLOOD is absolutely fine after getting a COVID-19 and flu vaccine, according to the American Red Cross.

Red Cross: It's OK to give blood after getting flu, COVID vaccines

With respiratory illnesses already spreading as temperatures cool, the American Red Cross is sharing an important reminder — it's okay to give blood after getting a flu shot or a COVID-19 vaccine or booster.

Receiving a flu shot or a COVID-19 vaccine or booster is a great way to protect your own health. It causes no wait period and does not affect blood donation eligibility, as long as you are healthy, feeling well and symptom free at the time of donation.

While the need for blood and platelet donations is constant, a severe cold and flu season can result in fewer donations if many become sick and need to postpone a blood donation until they are well.

According to health officials, both influenza and COVID-19 cases are expected to surge simultaneously this winter. They warn 100 million Americans – equivalent to nearly a third of the country's population – could get COVID-19 infections in the coming fall and winter.

That number could be even higher if a new variant enters the scene. With an increase in flu cases already being

seen in some communities, more healthy individuals will be needed to roll up a sleeve to donate.

"It's particularly important during the fall and winter months, when we see an increase in cold and flu cases, that those who are in good health share their good health by giving blood," said Dr. Baia Lasky for the American Red Cross.

For those who have the flu or COVID-19, it is important to wait until they no longer exhibit symptoms, have recovered completely and feel well before attempting to donate.

The Red Cross urges blood donors of all types and those who have never given before to book a time to give blood or platelets now and help keep the blood supply strong for hospital patients.

The Red Cross follows a high standard of safety and infection control. While donors are no longer required to wear a mask, individuals may choose to continue to do so.

Those who would like to share their good health by giving blood can find a blood drive and schedule a donation appointment by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.redcrossblood.org) or calling 1-800-RED CROSS.

CDC allows Novavax boosters for 18+

CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky, M.D., M.P.H., signed a decision memo on Oct. 19 allowing Novavax monovalent COVID-19 boosters for adults.

This action gives people ages 18 years and older the option to receive a Novavax monovalent booster instead of an updated (bivalent) Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna booster if they have

completed primary series vaccination but have not previously received a COVID-19 booster—and if they cannot or will not receive mRNA vaccines.

Some may be unable to receive an mRNA vaccine as a result of an allergy to a component of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, or as a result of a history of a severe allergic reaction

(such as anaphylaxis) after a previous dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, or a lack of availability of an mRNA vaccine.

People ages 18 and older may also choose to receive a Novavax monovalent booster if they are unwilling to receive mRNA vaccines, and would otherwise not receive a booster dose.

BENEFITS: *Steps for a healthy body, mind*

Continued from page 5

white blood cells. Cytokines are signaling compounds that play a variety of roles in the inflammation and immune response.

When we're fighting an infection, we need certain cytokines and infection-fighting white blood cells, which are released in higher levels during sleep, according to Dr. Eric Olson, MD, of the Mayo Clinic.

Not getting enough sleep can decrease this immune response, limiting our ability to fight infections.

Healthy sleep involves going through all sleep phases, and getting 7-9 hours for adults, and 10 hours for teenagers, according to Olson.

"More sleep isn't always better," Olson said. "For adults, sleeping more than 9-10 hours a night may result in a poor quality of sleep, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep."

Many people experienced difficulty sleeping after infection with COVID-19 or with stress related to the pandemic. Talk with your healthcare provider if you notice changes to your sleep quality as a variety of treatment options are available.

The CDC recommends the following practices for a healthy sleep routine:

- Be consistent. Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning, including on the weekends.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, relaxing, and at a comfortable temperature.
- Remove electronic devices, such as TVs, computers, and smart phones, from the bedroom.



- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.
 - Get some exercise. Being physically active during the day can help you fall asleep more easily at night.
- Taken together, the above lifestyle steps promote a healthy body and mind and support a balanced immune response. There are plenty of high-quality resources out there for healthy habits.
- Here are a few to try:**
- [Healthy Eating on a Budget](#) - Eating healthy doesn't have to be expensive. Tips and materials to make healthy choices while staying within your

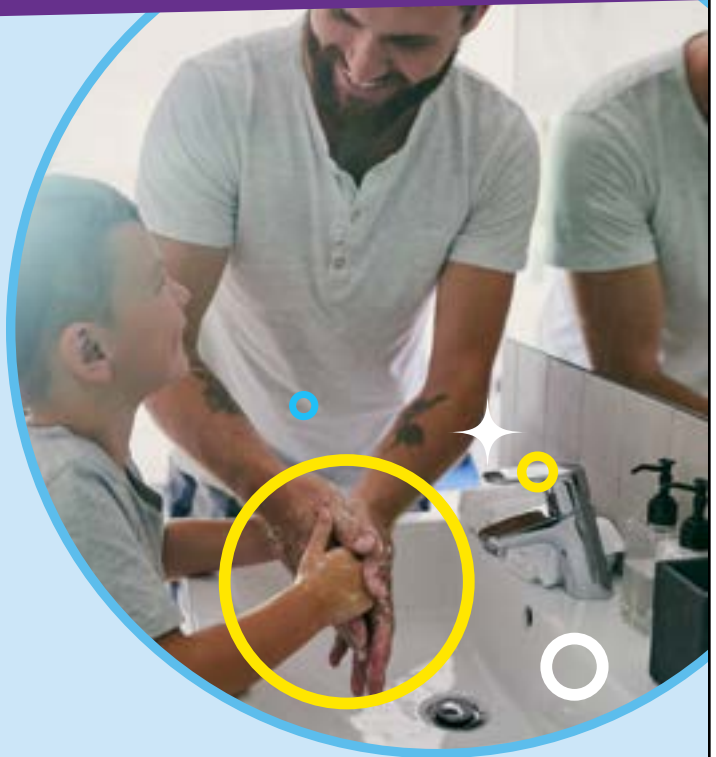
budget from MyPlate.

- [MyPlate](#) - Tips, recipes, and resources for healthy eating. Find kitchen inspiration by checking out [MyPlate - Videos](#).
 - [Old Ways](#) - Recipes and resources for cultural food traditions.
 - [Physical Activity Basics](#) - CDC exercise tips for children and adults, including current recommendations for different groups.
- *Shawn Morris, ND, is the community and family health manager for Island County Public Health.*

Stop Germs! Wash Your Hands.

When?

- After using the bathroom
- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone at home who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
- After handling pet food or pet treats
- After touching garbage



How?



Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.



Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.



Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.



Rinse hands well under clean, running water.



Dry hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important things we can do to stop the spread of germs and stay healthy.

LIFE IS BETTER WITH

CLEAN HANDS



www.cdc.gov/handwashing

This material was developed by CDC. The Life is Better with Clean Hands Campaign is made possible by a partnership between the CDC Foundation, GOJO, and Staples. HHS/CDC does not endorse commercial products, services, or companies.



CS310027-A

Data shows childhood vax rates flat

On-time child immunization helps protect from diseases



GET YOUR! VACCINE!

New school immunization data released Oct. 20 by the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) for the 2021-22 school year shows that the vaccination rates remain flat.

“Vaccines remain the single most important public health strategy for keeping communities safe from many communicable diseases that can lead to disability and death,” said Jamilia Sherls-Jones, director of the Office of Immunization. “We review vaccine data

to monitor trends, identify opportunities for improving completion rates, and recognize gains.”

DOH recommends that families and health care providers focus on getting children up to date on their vaccinations as soon as possible.

Washington state’s K-12 immunization completion rate for the 2021-22 school year was 91.7%. This rate has remained steady for the past two years, according to DOH.

After the implementation of House Bill 1638 in 2019, kindergartener vaccination rates for MMR – measles, mumps, and rubella – rose from 90.8% in the 2019-20 school year to 94.4% in the 2020-21 school year.

The data show the number of students with at least one personal vaccine exemption is going down, while the number of students with at least one religious membership exemption is going up.



OMICRON BA.5

Protect yourself. Protect others.

You're doing great! Don't let down your guard.
Stay safe by continuing to:

- Take a rapid home test before gathering or traveling
- Keep COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters up to date
- Gather safely, preferably outdoors
- Mask up in crowded spaces
- Wash your hands with soap and water
- If you're sick, STAY HOME!

Get free at-home test kits online at

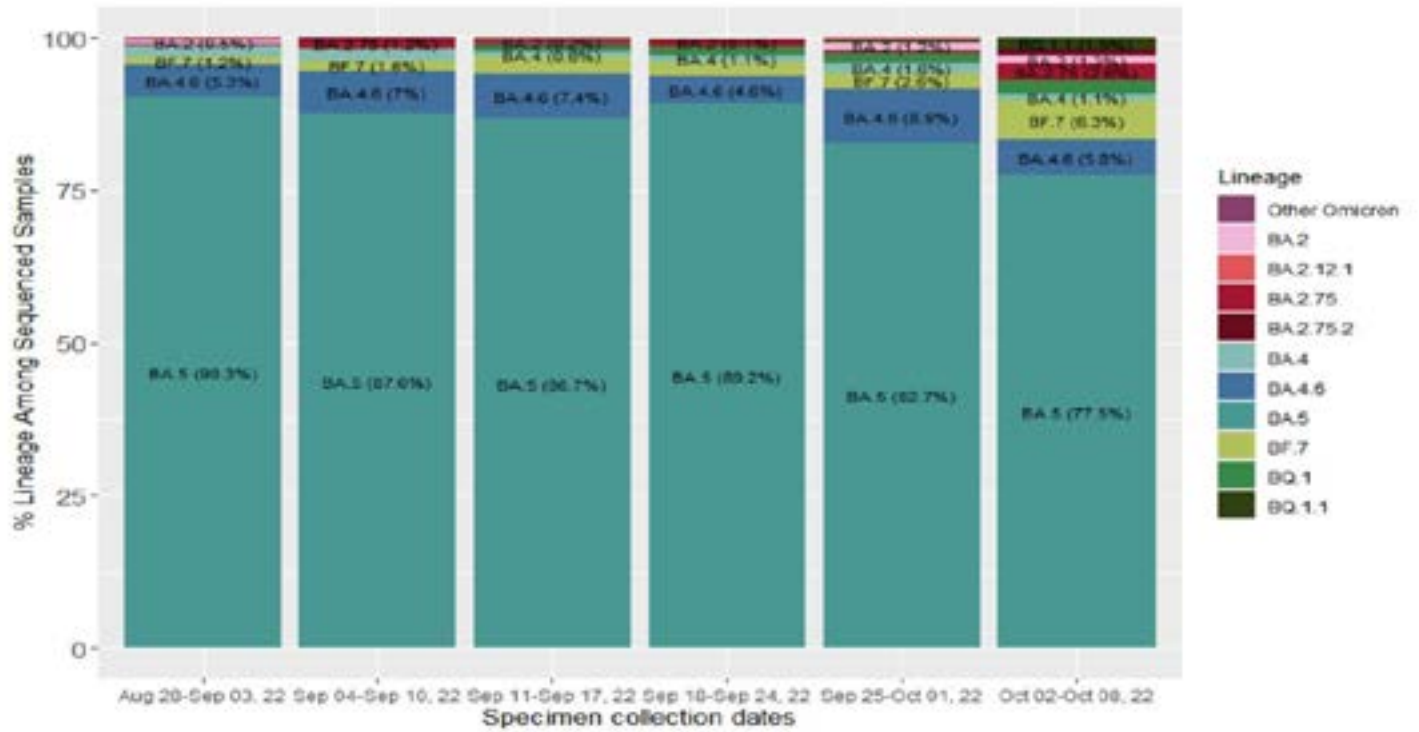
www.sayyescovidhometest.org



Contact Island County COVID Response if you are symptomatic and want to be tested, are planning a large event and need home-test kits, or to get more information about protecting yourself against COVID-19.

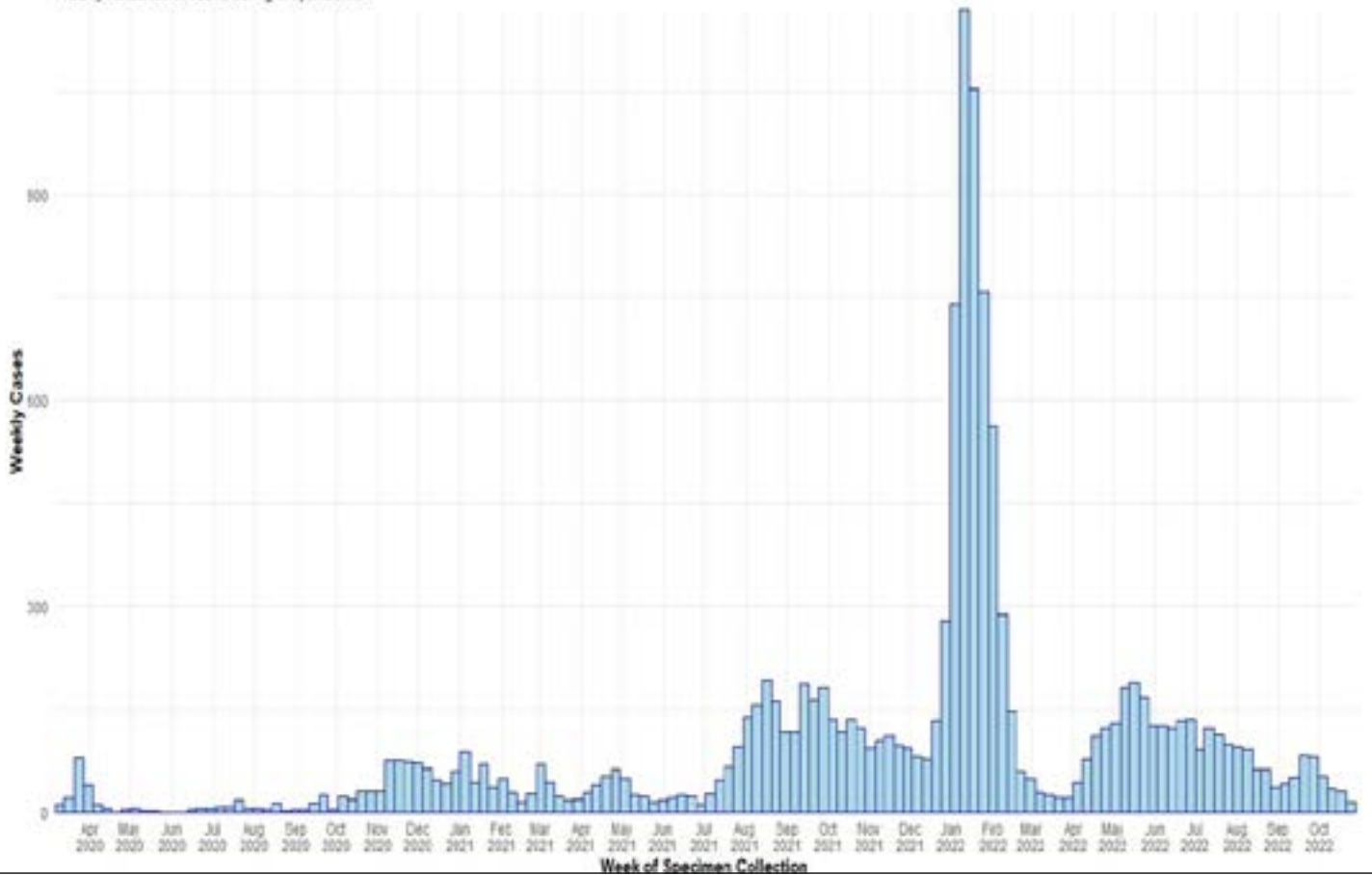
Call 360-678-2301. Hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

SARS-CoV-2 lineages circulating in Washington state



Island County COVID-19 Cases

Weekly incidence of cases during the pandemic



COVID-19 DATA

WADOH Transmission Level	CDC Community Impact Level		
MODERATE	LOW		
7-day Case Rate – 34.74	7-day Case Rate	7-day COVID-19 Hospitalization Rate	COVID-19 Occupancy 7-day Average
10 - 49.99	<200	<10.0	<10%

Case and hospitalization rates are evaluated in different time frames by different organizations. As a result, estimates may differ and be more or less current and complete depending on that evaluation frame.

14-Day Case Rate

Date	N	Population	Rate per 100,000
09/17/2022 – 09/30/2022	155	86,350	179.50
09/24/2022 – 10/07/2022	127	86,350	147.08
10/01/2022 – 10/14/2022	81	86,350	93.80
10/08/2022 – 10/21/2022	66	86,350	76.43

Number of COVID-19 cases in Washington state: **1,833,759** *

Number of COVID-19 deaths in Washington state: **14,528** *

Number of COVID-19 deaths in Island County: **103** *

* As of Oct. 25, 2022

Summary Table of Island County Count Positive COVID-19 Cases

Date	Count	Change
10/04/2022	12745	+64
10/11/2022	12805	+60
10/18/2022	12839	+34
10/25/2022	12873	+34

Island County Total Known Positive COVID-19 Cases by Location

Location	Positive Count	Death Count
Camano Island	3063	17
Clinton	628	6
Coupeville	937	16
Freeland	556	7
Greenbank	130	0
Langley	436	2
Oak Harbor	7119	55
Missing Accurate Zip	4	0
Total	12873	103

Vaccinated Island County Residents

Number of Island County residents who have initiated primary series

60,748

Population (6 months+) eligible to be vaccinated

84,974

Data as of 11:59 p.m. October 22, 2022

Source: Washington State Department of Health Data Dashboard

7-Day Hospitalization Rate

Date	N	Population	Rate per 100,000
09/21/2022 – 09/27/2022	6	86,350	6.95
09/28/2022 – 10/04/2022	5	86,350	5.79
10/05/2022 – 10/11/2022	1	86,350	1.16
10/12/2022 – 10/18/2022	1	86,350	1.16

Biden rolls up sleeve for updated booster

President Biden announced Oct. 25 efforts to get more Americans their updated COVID-19 vaccine, so that they are protected going into the holiday season.

More than 20 million Americans, including nearly one in five seniors, have already rolled up their sleeves to get an updated COVID-19 vaccine, and Biden encouraged more Americans to do so right away.

Biden received his updated COVID-19 vaccine, and called on everyone — including state, local, education, and business leaders — to do their part to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their communities.

While COVID-19 is not the disruptive force it was when Biden took office, the virus continues to evolve. COVID-19, flu, and other respiratory illnesses spread more quickly in the winter, as people gather indoors. As the weather gets colder, Americans must take action to stay protected.

The updated vaccines target the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants of omicron — the versions of the virus that are most dominant in the U.S. and around the world. For most Americans, if they get this updated COVID-19 vaccine, they can go about their lives this fall and



Biden

winter with the peace of mind that they remain protected against serious illness. And, if they do get sick, there are widely available and easily accessible treatments that reduce the severity of illness, keep people out of the hospital, and save lives.

Biden also announced the following actions:

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is launching new national and local TV, radio and print ads geared at reaching Black and Latino audiences in more than 30 markets in English and Spanish.

Also, new social and digital ads will run on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, and Reddit. The ads highlight the importance of getting the updated vaccine.

HHS will launch a #VaxUpAmerica Family Vaccine Tour to encourage families to get the updated COVID-19 vaccine for maximum protection going into the winter and holiday season.

As part of the tour, HHS will work with national and community-based organizations and others to reach families where they are with information on COVID-19 vaccines, and will host pop-up vaccination events and distribute toolkits at venues such as Head Start provider locations, nursing homes, and community health centers around the country.

HHS launched the tour on Oct. 26.

In the next week, Medicare will send a second email reminder to the 16 million people who have signed up to receive

Medicare emails with information about the updated COVID-19 vaccines and how to get them. CMS has also added a message on the updated COVID-19 vaccines and the availability of effective treatments to the 1-800-MEDICARE line.

During this year's Medicare Open Enrollment period, CMS expects to reach about 5 million people through these messages. CMS will also reemphasize the importance of updated vaccines and available treatments to Medicare Advantage plans and urge them to ensure their members have the information they need to protect themselves and their families.

Biden called on employers and school leaders to once again do their part to get their communities protected, including by helping people get their updated COVID-19 vaccine ahead of the winter. He called on employers to take actions such as offering paid-time-off for vaccination, and working with local vaccine providers to host on-site vaccination clinics for employees.

Biden called on the nation's pharmacies to double down on efforts to get Americans their updated COVID-19 vaccines this fall. The federal pharmacy vaccination program, which the administration launched in February 2021, now includes over 40,000 local pharmacies across the country, and is responsible for more than 270 million shots in arms to date, including roughly three out of four updated COVID-19 vaccines administered.

Emergency orders on insurance coverage end Oct. 31

Three emergency orders issued by Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler related to insurance coverage and COVID-19 will expire on Oct. 31.

The orders requiring health insurers to waive copays and deductibles for any consumer requiring testing for COVID-19, protecting consumers from receiving surprise bills for lab fees related to medically necessary diagnostic testing and requiring insurers to cover COVID-19 vaccine counseling all expire when Washington state's state of emergency ends.

Kreidler's order waiving cost-sharing applied to all state-regulated health insurance plans and short-term, limited-duration medical plans.

The order on surprise billing applied to both in-state and out-of-state laboratories when a provider orders diagnostic

testing for COVID-19.

Also, insurers had to:

- Allow a one-time early refill for prescription drugs.
- Suspend any prior authorization requirement for treatment or testing of COVID-19.

In addition, if an insurer did not have enough medical providers in its network to provide testing or treatment for COVID-19, it had to allow enrollees to be treated by another provider within a reasonable distance at no additional cost.

"I issued these orders to provide guidance to insurers and reassure the public that we would take all necessary steps to protect them," said Kreidler.

Kreidler issued the first order on March 3, 2020 as the need for flexibility and added protections for consumers became apparent.

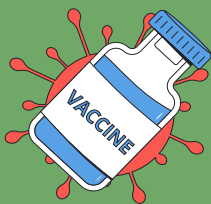
CONCERNED ABOUT COVID OR FLU?

STOP THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS!



WASH YOUR HANDS

WITH SOAP AND WARM WATER FOR 20 SECONDS OR MORE. CAN'T WASH HANDS? USE HAND SANITIZER.



GET VACCINATED

AGAINST COVID AND FLU.



CLEAN AND DISINFECT

FREQUENTLY USED SURFACES LIKE TABLES, COUNTERS, LIGHT SWITCHES, DOOR KNOBS, AND TV REMOTE CONTROLS.



KEEP HANDS AWAY

FROM FACE TO STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS.



IF YOU FEEL SICK, STAY HOME

FROM WORK, SCHOOL, AND OTHER EVENTS OR ACTIVITIES. IF NEEDED, SEEK MEDICAL CARE.



Island County COVID Response

www.islandcountywa.gov

