

Preparing for the Fall and Winter Virus Season

During the fall and winter months, respiratory viruses tend to spread more widely. Common respiratory viruses include the common cold, influenza (flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and COVID-19. Although some people have mild symptoms when they catch a virus, others get sick enough to be hospitalized, especially older or higher-risk adults. Some seasons are more severe than others based on strains of the viruses circulating and immunity to these viruses.

Respiratory disease season lasts from October through May in the United States, peaking between December and February. As it approaches, employers can plan to prepare for the ongoing threat of colds, flu, RSV and COVID-19 and consider the best practices in this article for the 2025-26 respiratory virus season.

Employer Guidance

As respiratory viruses and infections spread in the fall and winter, employers should do their due diligence and continue incorporating employee health and safety in workplace plans, policies and benefits. Consider the following best practices for addressing employee health and safety during this year's respiratory virus season:

- **Review organizational risks.** Employers can assess exposures and determine how to respond to these illnesses. Employers could identify the hazards and risks for their on-site workplaces and implement controls (e.g., personal protective equipment and administrative or engineering controls).
- **Establish remote work policies.** If the workforce is primarily on-site, employers can consider having a backup plan to allow employees to work from home when dealing with virus-related symptoms. Some respiratory illnesses may not be debilitating in all cases, so employees can still work but remain isolated to reduce the chances of others getting infected.
- **Review paid time off (PTO) and leave policies.** Consider how to apply PTO policies to account for sick days. For example, policies may include allowing negative balances in PTO banks or allowing employees to take time off when they or their family members are sick.
- **Educate workers about vaccinations.** Vaccinations have been shown to reduce hospitalizations, so employers can encourage employees to get vaccinated. This fall, vaccines for the flu, RSV and COVID-19 are available for certain individuals. Health experts recommend that adults get their flu vaccine by the end of October.
- **Encourage healthy employee behaviors.** Employee education is also critical for healthy employee behavior changes. Aside from vaccinations, people need to get a good night's sleep, stay active and drink plenty of water to keep their immune systems strong. Employers could also encourage workers to eat a nutritious diet of healthy grains, fruits, vegetables and fiber. Employee benefits could support these aspects of personal health and wellness or even incentivize healthy behaviors.
- **Keep cleaning supplies on hand.** If employees are working on-site, it can be beneficial to have hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies available for employee use. Businesses can encourage good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene to help prevent the spread of illnesses.
- **Foster open communication.** Employers can encourage employees to talk to their managers if they're experiencing any health issues, including long-lasting ones that may impact their performance. Training for managers could also help them respond appropriately to such conversations, which could properly address employee concerns, strengthen employee well-being and reduce legal risks.

Overall, employers should try to remain agile and accommodating while protecting and supporting their workforces during this viral season.

For More Information

As infections and hospitalizations are expected, employers can review workplace policies and consider ways to protect and support employees who may catch a respiratory infection this season.

For the latest updates about the current respiratory virus season, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website](https://www.cdc.gov/). Contact us today for additional workplace guidance.

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