Issued: **April 15, 2025**

OPWDD Respiratory Viral Transmission Infection Control Guidance for COVID-19, Influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) in Community-Based Settings and Programs

This guidance supersedes and replaces the following OPWDD respiratory viral illness documents:

- Management of Communicable Respiratory Viral Infections
- Revised Protocols for the Implementation of Isolation for Individuals Who Test Positive for COVID-19 and Precautions for Individuals Exposed to COVID-19 Residing in OPWDD Certified Facilities
- Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the "Revised Protocols for the Implementation of Isolation for Individuals who Test Positive for COVID-19 and Precautions for Individuals Exposed to COVID-19 Residing in OPWDD Certified Facilities"
- Revised Protocols for Personnel in Clinical and Direct Care Settings to Return to Work Following COVID-19 Exposure or Infection

NOTE: This guidance applies to all providers of services to people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) that are certified and/or operated by OPWDD **EXCEPT FOR** Intermediate Care Facilities or Specialty Hospitals which must follow the OPWDD guidance applicable to Healthcare Settings.

Based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for preventing respiratory viral infections in community-based non-healthcare settings and programs, the following guidance outlines best practices to reduce the transmission of respiratory viruses such as COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).[1]

Core Prevention Strategies

- Immunizations:
  - Encourage people to stay up to date with recommended vaccinations[2], including annual influenza shots and COVID-19 boosters and RSV vaccine for older adults[3].
  - For certified residential sites with nursing oversight, ensure access to appointments for preventive healthcare to ensure the opportunity to receive all necessary preventive care.
  - Provide information on vaccine availability and facilitate access to vaccination services.

- Hygiene Practices:
  - Promote regular handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing, sneezing, or touching high-contact surfaces.
  - Hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol content should be readily available in all common areas.
  - Perform enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces with emphasis on "high touch" surfaces such as doorknobs.
  - Display and share educational materials on proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, such as covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or elbow.

- Air Quality Measures:
  - Ensure adequate ventilation in indoor spaces by opening windows and doors when feasible.
  - Maintain heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems properly.
  - Consider using high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters in areas with limited ventilation.

- Isolation When Sick:
  - Advise staff who exhibit symptoms of respiratory illness to stay home and avoid contact with others to the extent possible. Establish a clear sick leave policy for staff to support this practice.
  - Ensure that **symptomatic people** who have suspected flu, COVID-19 or RSV and cannot tolerate wearing a mask, do not attend communal activities and day programs for the appropriate timeframes based on the person's symptoms[4]. In the meantime, provide staff supervision, alternative activities, and consider other reasonable alternative accommodations as needed.
  - Provide guidelines on symptom monitoring and criteria for returning to program[4].

- Treatment Access:
  - Ensure that people exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness are promptly assessed by a nurse via phone, virtual visit or in-person.
  - Encourage people at higher risk of severe illness to consult with their healthcare providers promptly upon symptom onset.
  - Nurses who provide oversight of care should ensure that people consult with their healthcare provider about antiviral treatments[5] for illness like influenza and COVID-19.
  - Prophylactic treatment access should also be ensured for those who have been exposed and are identified as having high risk. Prophylactic treatment for flu, regardless of vaccination status, is recommended for people with high risk who live in congregate settings.

<u>Additional Prevention Strategies:</u>

- Mask Usage:
  - People with respiratory illness should be encouraged to wear a mask when near others in their home or when they must be in the community for essential care, if they can tolerate the mask.
  - Recommend all staff wear well-fitting masks, especially in settings with known cases of respiratory viral illnesses, or when interacting with vulnerable populations during times of increased community circulation of respiratory viruses.
  - Provide masks at entry points and common areas for those who may need or want to use them.

- Physical Distancing:
  - Encourage maintaining a safe distance from others, particularly during outbreaks.
  - Rearrange communal spaces to facilitate physical distancing.
  - For non-residential settings, if a person is feeling ill, they should stay home and away from others. See additional information in the *Return to Program* section of this guidance document.

- Testing Protocols:
  - Seek medical care after known exposures or when symptoms are present and follow physician recommendations regarding testing for respiratory viruses[6],
  - Provide information on local testing sites and resources. Information for no-cost COVID-19 testing can be found here.[7]

<u>Special Considerations:</u>

- High-Risk Populations:
  - Identify and offer additional protections for people at increased risk of severe illness, including people with disabilities[8], older adults[9], young children[10], pregnant individuals[11], and those with weakened immune systems.[12]
  - Implement tailored measures such as dedicated areas, enhanced protective equipment, or modified activities to reduce exposure risks during times of increased community circulation of respiratory viruses.

- Accessibility and Inclusivity:
  - Ensure that all preventive measures and communications are accessible to people with

disabilities.
    - Provide materials in multiple languages and formats to accommodate diverse needs.

Return to Program

- People should not attend program if they have respiratory virus symptoms that cannot be explained by another cause (e.g., seasonal allergies, etc.).
    - Respiratory illness symptoms may include fever, chills, fatigue, cough, runny nose, and headache. See the New York State Department of Health's webpage on flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and COVID-19.[13]

- Refer to the CDC webpage, Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You're Sick[4] for examples to help determine return to program timeframes.

- In general, people may return to program when, for at least 24 hours
    - There has been an overall improvement of symptoms **AND**,
    - They no longer have a fever without the use of fever-reducing medication.

- When returning to program, keep in mind that people may still be able to spread the virus that made them sick, even if they are feeling better, so it is important to take extra precautions after resuming normal activities. The following additional precautions are recommended over the next 5 days:
    - Taking additional steps for cleaner air,
    - Emphasizing hygiene practices,
    - Wearing masks, and
    - Physical distancing.
    - **NOTE:** If a person cannot tolerate wearing a mask, the program must consider reasonable alternative accommodations so that the person can safely return to program (e.g., using a separate space, outdoor activities – weather permitting, etc.) during the 5-day period, and document attempted accommodations.

Quick Reference Guide

Source: NYSDOH[1]	**Flu**	**Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)**	**COVID-19**
Overview	Most people – including children – will recover from the flu on their own, but some people will experience severe illness requiring hospitalization.	Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) infection can cause severe infection in some people, including babies 12 months and younger, especially premature babies, seniors, people with heart and lung disease, or anyone with a weak immune system (immunocompromised). In adults and older, healthy children, RSV symptoms are mild and typically mimic the common cold. Self-care measures are usually all that's needed to relieve any discomfort.	COVID-19 can cause severe infection in some people, including children, and can lead to hospitalization and even death. People who have received COVID-19 vaccines can still experience infections, although their risk of severe illness and hospitalization is greatly reduced.
Time from exposure to infection	2 to 3 days	1 to 4 days	2 to 14 days

Source: NYSDOH[1]	Flu	Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)	COVID-19
Prevention	Get immunized • Wash your hands often • Avoid people who are sick • Wear a mask in crowded places	Get immunized if eligible • Wash your hands often • Avoid people who are sick • Wear a mask in crowded places	Get immunized – including updated vaccine • Wash your hands often • Avoid people who are sick • Wear a mask in crowded places
Symptoms	• Body aches • Chills • Cough • Fatigue • Fever • Headache • Sore throat • Stuffy nose	• Cough • Fever • Stuffy/Runny Nose • Decreased Appetite	• Body aches • Chills • Cough • Diarrhea • Fatigue • Fever • Headache • Loss of smell/taste • Nausea/Vomiting • Shortness of Breath • Sore Throat • Stuffy/Runny Nose
What to do if sick	• Stay home and away from others • Cover your cough and sneezes • Clean and disinfect surfaces • Call health care provider	• Stay home and away from others • Cover your cough and sneezes • Clean and disinfect surfaces • Call health care provider	• Stay home and away from others • Cover your cough and sneezes • Clean and disinfect surfaces • Call health care provider

For any questions, or assistance in implementing these management strategies, please contact the Bureau of Nursing and Health Services at: Nursingandhealthservices@opwdd.ny.gov

References

1. https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/respiratory_syncytial_virus/understanding.htm
2. CDC. (9/11/2024). Immunizations for Respiratory Viruses Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/immunizations.html
3. CDC. (8/30/2024). RSV Vaccine Guidance for Older Adults: https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/hcp/vaccine-clinical-guidance/older-adults.html
4. CDC. (3/1/2024). Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You're Sick: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html
5. CDC. 3/1/2024. Treatment of Respiratory Viruses: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/treatment/index.html
6. CDC. (3/1/2024). Testing and Respiratory Viruses: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/testing.html
7. CDC. (n.d.). Search for No-Cost COVID-19 Testing: https://testinglocator.cdc.gov/Search

8. Respiratory Viruses and People with Disabilities. (3/1/2024). Respiratory Viruses and People with Disabilitieshttps://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/risk-factors/people-with-disabilities.html
9. CDC. (12/3/2024). Respiratory Viruses and Older Adults: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/risk-factors/older-adults.html
10. CDC. (9/26/2024). Respiratory Viruses and Young Children: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/risk-factors/young-children.html

CDC. (9/26/2024). Respiratory Viruses and Pregnancy: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/risk-factors/pregnancy.html

12. CDC. (9/26/24). Respiratory Viruses and People with Weakened Immune Systems: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/risk-factors/weakened-immune-systems.html
13. NYSDOH. Understanding Respiratory Illnesses - RSV, Flu, and COVID-19: https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/respiratory_syncytial_virus/understanding.htm

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Respiratory Virus Guidance. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/index.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Respiratory Virus Guidance Update Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/faqs.html

New York State Department of Health. (March 7, 2024). Health Advisory: Updated recommendations on when to stay home and when to go back to normal activities after respiratory illnesses including COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) – Non-Healthcare Settings. Retrieved from https://www.schoolhealthny.com/cms/lib/NY01832015/Centricity/Domain/108/NYSDOH3.7.24.pdf

New York State Department of Health. COVID-19 Prevention & Symptoms. Retrieved from https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/prevention-symptoms

New York State Department of Health. (October 2024) Flu (Influenza). Retrieved from https://health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/seasonal/