

Respiratory Viruses and Older Adults

What to know

In addition to CDC's Respiratory Virus Guidance, there are several specific considerations for people who are at higher risk for severe illness, including older adults.

Overview

As people get older, their immune systems do not work as well. Older adults are also more likely to have underlying health conditions. Most deaths from respiratory viruses occur in people older than 65, with risk increasing sharply with advancing age.

Why prevention is important

Studies have shown that:

- Compared to people ages 18-39 years, people ages over 75 are about 9 times as likely to die from COVID-19. [Learn more.](#)
- Each year, it is estimated that 60,000-160,000 older adults in the United States are hospitalized due to RSV infection and 6,000-10,000 die. [Learn more.](#)
- In recent years, it's estimated that between 70 percent and 85 percent of seasonal flu-related deaths in the United States have occurred among people 65 years and older, and between about 50 percent and 70 percent of seasonal flu-related hospitalizations have occurred among people in this age group. [Learn more.](#)
- Over 95% of adults hospitalized in 2023-2024 due to COVID-19 had no record of receiving the latest vaccine.

Reducing risk

If you are, or if you spend time with, an older adult, using the prevention strategies described in CDC's [Respiratory Virus Guidance](#) is especially important. In addition, there are several specific considerations for older adults listed below.

- **[Immunizations](#)**
 - In addition to getting a current COVID-19 vaccine, there are some unique respiratory virus immunization recommendations for older adults:
 - All adults ages 65 years and older are recommended to receive an additional updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine dose.
 - All adults should have a current flu vaccine, but adults aged 65 years or older are recommended to receive a high dose or adjuvanted flu vaccine (for example, Fluzone High-Dose Quadrivalent inactivated flu vaccine, Flublok Quadrivalent recombinant flu vaccine, or Fluad Quadrivalent adjuvanted inactivated flu vaccine).
 - Adults ages 60 years and older should talk to their healthcare provider about whether an RSV vaccine is right for them.
 - [The Eldercare Locator](#), a national resource funded by the Administration for Community Living, can help older adults find local vaccination clinics, connect with accessible transportation, and provide other assistance in accessing vaccinations.

- **[Masks](#)**
 - Note that better fitting [masks](#) (for example, N95 or KN95 respirators) are more effective at protecting you from inhaling germs than other types of masks are (for example, cloth masks or surgical/disposable masks).

- **[Treatment](#)**
 - [COVID-19 antivirals](#) are recommended for all older adults (over age 50) and certain people at higher risk for complications from COVID-19.
 - [Flu antivirals](#) are recommended for certain people at high risk for complications from flu, including adults ages 65 years and older.
 - To learn more about if treatment is right for you, speak with a healthcare provider.

- **[Tests](#)**
 - The Administration for Community Living and the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response are partnering to distribute tests to the aging and disability networks. You may be able to get COVID-19 tests for free through your [Area Agency on Aging](#).