



Clallam County Department of Health and Human Services

111 E. 3rd Street • Port Angeles, WA 98362 • Phone: 360-417-2303 • Fax: 360-452-9605

December 6, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Siri Forsman-Sims, Communications Specialist

Clallam County Public Health

Phone: 360-417-2583

Email: siri.sims@clallamcountywa.gov

Respiratory Illness on the Rise in Clallam County

Cases of RSV, flu, and COVID-19 are surging across the county and state

CLALLAM COUNTY - Clallam County and the rest of Washington state have seen a rapid increase in severe respiratory infections caused by respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), influenza, and COVID-19 infections. Infants and children below the age of two are especially vulnerable, as are older adults. In the last week, three Clallam County residents have died due to respiratory illness: one infant, one woman in her 60s, and one woman in her 80s.

Flu and COVID-19 are familiar to most people, while RSV is less known. RSV is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms and is the leading cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs) in children under the age of one in the United States. Most people recover in seven to 14 days. However, RSV can cause serious health risks, especially for infants and children below the age of two.

Common symptoms of RSV infection:

- Runny nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing

The surge in respiratory infections has caused a rise in hospitalizations in the Puget Sound Region, straining the hospital systems. According to Bobby Beeman, spokesperson for OMC,

"Hospitals across the state are experiencing very high volumes of patients, making it difficult for OMC and other rural hospitals to transfer patients to larger, urban hospitals that offer specialized care. OMC laboratory tests reveal that two strains of influenza, RSV, and COVID viral infections are all causing illnesses in the community simultaneously. OMC is currently seeing

an increase in patients in the Emergency Department, in the hospital setting, and at the Walk-in Clinic, Primary Care and Children's Clinic."

Pediatric capacity is now stretched beyond capacity on the west side of Washington, with Pediatric ER & ICU crowding currently the most concerning trend.

- Pediatric ER volumes remain at record high at pediatric specialty hospitals.
- ER volumes at pediatric hospitals are 200%-300% of baseline capacity with record high ER wait times and waiting room volumes.
- Significant increase in Influenza activity in western WA is compounding pediatric respiratory surge/capacity issues.
- Several facilities report record high levels of pediatric behavioral health patient boarding which is a worsening trend.

Protect children and others through the following practices:

- Wear a mask – anyone two years of age or older.
- Stay home when you are sick and keep children home when they feel sick, even if everyone tests negative for COVID-19.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and teach children to frequently wash their hands in the same way.
- Practice, and teach, cough and sneeze etiquette — cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, throw the tissue in the nearest garbage can, and wash your hands after you throw it away. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands.
- Children with cold-like symptoms should not interact with children at high risk for severe RSV disease, including premature infants, children younger than two years of age with chronic lung or heart conditions, children with weakened immune systems, or children with neuromuscular disorders.

How to care for RSV infection in children:

- Keep them hydrated (Pedialyte or watered-down juice can help in kids over the age of one)
- Suck the mucous out of their nose (over the counter devices like the NoseFrida can help)
- Use a humidifier
- Treat fever and discomfort with over-the-counter acetaminophen (Tylenol) according to your child's weight

Call your healthcare professional if you, or your child, is having difficulty breathing (using extra muscles around the chest or neck to breathe), not drinking enough fluids to make wet diapers, becoming lethargic, or have a fever higher than 104°F that will not resolve with Tylenol.

For more information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: RSV in Infants and Young Children ([en español](#))
- American Academy of Pediatrics: RSV: When It's More Than Just a Cold ([en español](#))