

Contact: Laina Mitchell  
Email: [lmitchell@granthealth.org](mailto:lmitchell@granthealth.org)  
Phone: 509-766-7960 EXT 30

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Provider Alert: Respiratory Illnesses Straining Health Systems in Washington**

**Health Officer advises to anticipate a further rise in respiratory viruses activity.**

**Grant County, WA – The Grant County Health Officer, Dr. Alexander Brzezny, has issued the following alert to update the Grant County healthcare community on the 2022-2023 influenza and respiratory virus season.** Influenza and respiratory virus season has begun in our region. Healthcare facilities should be implementing their “influenza season” policies immediately.

The broadly observed nationwide respiratory viruses surge began more than a month ago in the Eastern U.S. Multiple viruses, including Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), influenza, metapneumovirus, adenovirus, rhinovirus and to a lesser extent for now, SARS-CoV-2, are reported as rising nationally. The impact has also been felt in Washington state, with an observable increase in respiratory diseases activity in Grant County more recently. This increase is especially evident among children and continues to place stress on the Grant County healthcare system.

As in the past, we ask that healthcare providers take precautions to protect themselves by wearing N95 masks when treating or testing individuals with respiratory illness.

**COVID-19: Anyone who is not up to date with COVID-19 vaccination should be vaccinated now.** Rates of COVID-19-associated hospitalizations among all age groups including children have decreased since August, but **COVID-19 hospitalization rates in infants and younger children are proportionately higher than in other pediatric age groups, and higher than in all adult age groups except those 65 years and older.** CDC expects continued high-level circulation of SARS-CoV-2 this fall and winter. Healthcare providers should encourage eligible patients who are 6 months and older to receive the primary COVID-19 series or the updated bivalent booster (as indicated). Up-to-date vaccination remains the most important intervention aimed at reducing COVID-19 complications.

**Influenza: CDC has been tracking early and increasing influenza activity in recent weeks.** The most common viruses identified to date have been influenza A(H3N2) viruses, with most infections occurring in children and young adults. GCHD recommends influenza vaccination with an age-appropriate influenza vaccine for all people 6 months and older. Influenza and COVID-19 vaccines can be administered at the same visit. Flu vaccines reduce hospitalizations and complications of influenza.

**Please report any influenza related death or influenza amongst long term care residents to GCHD.**

**RSV:** Preliminary data from October 2022 show that weekly rates of RSV-associated hospitalizations among children younger than 18 years old are **higher than rates observed during similar weeks in recent years**. Healthcare providers should consider and test for RSV in at risk patients (particularly infants and younger children) presenting with respiratory illness.

**Grant County Statistics for 2021-2022 Influenza Season:**

As a disclaimer, influenza reporting is not mandated unless associated with a death. GCHD has reporting agreements with several healthcare entities to monitor influenza activity across Grant County. Statistics for the 2021-2022 influenza season are below:

- 0 lab confirmed influenza deaths
- 569 lab confirmed influenza A
- 49 lab confirmed influenza B
- 4 lab confirmed influenza A/B

**Washington State Influenza Update:**

- **26 lab confirmed influenza deaths** have been reported for the 2021-2022 season to date.
- **16 influenza-like outbreaks in LTC facilities** have been reported to date.

<b>Season</b>	<b>Count of Deaths as of Week 43 of Season</b>	<b>Count of Deaths Reported for the Entire Season (week 40 to week 39)</b>
2022-2023, to date	3	3
2021-2022	0	26
2020-2021	0	0
2019-2020	1	114
2018-2019	2	245
2017-2018	1	296
2016-2017	3	278
2015-2016	1	67
2014-2015	0	156

Please continue to enforce masking at healthcare facilities as per the Washington State Health Secretary Order. Follow your vaccination and occupational health policies and appropriately exclude those with infectious conditions according to current guidelines (for example, 5 days minimum exclusion for COVID-19). Encourage vaccination among patients who are not up to date on COVID-19, influenza and other vaccines. While working with patients that exhibit symptoms of any respiratory illnesses, we recommend health care providers wear an N95 mask.

**Resources:**

Washington State Influenza Summary 2021-2022 Season

<https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/420-100-FluUpdateSeason2022.pdf?uid=636d415a31330>

Increased Respiratory Virus Activity, Especially Among Children, Early in the 2022-2023 Fall and Winter

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2022/han00479.asp>

Washington State Health Secretary Order

[https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/1600/coronavirus//Secretary\\_of\\_Health\\_Order\\_20-03\\_Statewide\\_Face\\_Coverings.pdf](https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/1600/coronavirus//Secretary_of_Health_Order_20-03_Statewide_Face_Coverings.pdf)