



# News Release

For immediate release: November 18, 2022

(22-170)

Media contact: [DOH Communications](#)

## Celebrating safely this holiday season

*Preparation and prevention strategies can help keep you safe and healthy*

**OLYMPIA** – With the cooler weather comes traditional holiday gatherings with friends and family. Amid a strained hospital system, an early and more severe respiratory virus season, and people gathering to celebrate, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) would like to remind everyone how to stay safe and healthy this holiday season.

Respiratory viruses are more common this time of year and medical facilities, especially pediatric emergency departments, are seeing a higher-than-usual number of patients for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Hospitals were already operating at higher capacity, and it has become even more important to utilize preventive measures to ensure there is space for those with critical health needs.

“Connecting is important during the holiday season but it can be challenging when we are concerned about our own health and that of those around us,” said Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, Washington State Secretary of Health. “A little prevention can go a long way in helping us enjoy our social circle and stay healthy at the same time.”

### **Tips to help lower the risk of contracting viruses, spreading illness, or needing hospital care in the coming months:**

- Although masks are no longer required for the public except in [healthcare settings and correctional facilities](#), **DOH recommends you consider wearing a mask in crowded or poorly ventilated settings** to reduce the chance of getting sick or spreading viruses.
  - *Note - DOH had planned to update current masking requirements by mid-November. It is continuing its review and plans to issue an update in the coming weeks.*

- **DOH recommends everyone 6 months and older be vaccinated for influenza and COVID-19** to lower risk of transmission and serious illness. If you have already been vaccinated against COVID-19, make an appointment now to receive your booster. People ages 5 years and older who had their last COVID-19 shot at least two months ago can get the updated booster. Influenza and COVID-19 vaccines can be safely given at the same time. There is currently no approved vaccine for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).
- **If you or a member of your family are sick, stay home and use the appropriate level of care necessary.** Call your healthcare provider or pediatrician for advice or to make an appointment. Consider going to an urgent care or check if telehealth is an option. For emergencies, call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest emergency room immediately.
- **Wash your hands often** and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose, which are where viruses commonly enter the body.
- **Consider taking a COVID-19 test prior to gathering**, especially if you are getting together with people who are older, immunocompromised, or at risk for severe disease.
- **Practice food safety** by washing your hands, keeping foods at the correct temperature, preparing foods correctly, and disinfecting surfaces.

Simple but important steps can help keep all of us healthy and safe this holiday season!

Further information on staying safe and healthy during the holidays is available on the [DOH website](#).

The [DOH website](#) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#). Sign up for the DOH blog, [Public Health Connection](#).

###