pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF EPIDEMIOLOGY

Travelers (pa.gov)

The Safe Traveler Bulletin

Health information to guide Pennsylvania travelers on how
to prevent illness for themselves and communities while traveling.

Prevention and Treatment for Respiratory Viruses This Winter

RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) is easily spread when a person with the virus coughs or sneezes. Symptoms include a runny nose, cough, and fever. Most people have mild illnesses and recover without medical care, but in severe cases, pneumonia can occur. Since there is no specific medicine for the treatment of RSV, prevention and vaccination are the key. **The CDC recommends vaccination for:**

- pregnant women (to protect newborns)
- babies and toddlers
- adults ages 60 and older

Influenza (the flu) spreads similarly to RSV. Its symptoms include fever, body aches, coughing, and feeling very tired. The best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu shot every year. Most cases are mild and no medical care is needed, but antiviral medications are available to help you feel better, able to travel, and can be prescribed by your doctor. Common antiviral drugs used to treat the flu include *Tamiflu, Relenza*, and *Rapivab*. These drugs work best when taken within the first 48 hours of being sick. Keep in mind that antibiotics are not effective in treating the flu.

COVID-19 is a global concern, especially for travelers. The virus is very easily spread through respiratory droplets and being in close contact with people sick with COVID-19. If you get sick or test positive immediately stay away from others and do not travel. If you have symptoms (which can range from mild to severe) including fever, cough, and shortness of breath get tested and seek medical advice. Treatments include *Paxlovid*, an antiviral medication for mild to moderate COVID-19 for those 12 and older and *Lagevrio,* for adults at high risk. The best way to prevent severe COVID-19 is by getting vaccinated.

RSV, influenza, and severe COVID-19 infection levels are posted weekly to PA's Respiratory Virus Dashboard.

2023-24 Flu (pa.gov)

Scan Code

Pennsylvania's New Respiratory Virus Dashboard

Cases by Week Reported into PA-NEDSS*

Virus ● Influenza A ● Influenza B ● RSV
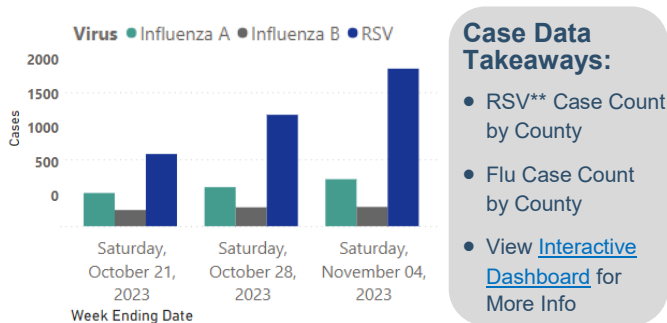
Case Data Takeaways:
- RSV** Case Count by County
- Flu Case Count by County
- View Interactive Dashboard for More Info

New COVID-19 Hospital Admissions
2023, 2022, 2021, 2020
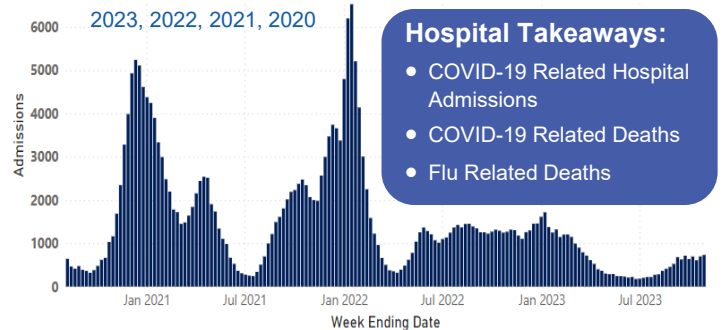
Hospital Takeaways:
- COVID-19 Related Hospital Admissions
- COVID-19 Related Deaths
- Flu Related Deaths

Comparison of PA-NEDSS Influenza Cases (All Types) in Current Season to the Previous Seasons
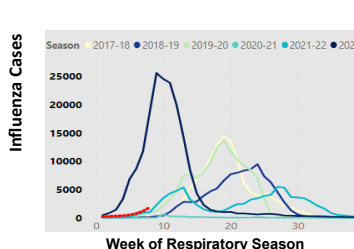
Seasonal Comparison:
- Comparison of Cases in Current Flu Season to Previous Flu Season
- Comparison of Cases in Current RSV Season to Previous RSV Season

RSV and FLU Cases by County Reported TO PA-NEDSS*

Updated Weekly during Flu Season

Case Quartiles
5--8
9--23
25--59
63--237
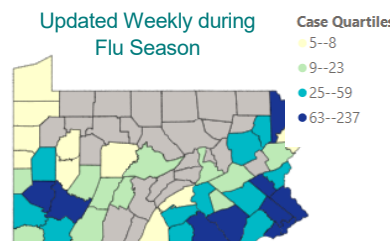
Additional Takeaways:
- Percentage of ER Visits for Flu, RSV, & COVID-19
- Percentage of Circulating Flu Strains
- Visit Website for More Resources

*PA-NEDSS: Pennsylvania's version of the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System

**RSV: Respiratory Syncytial Virus

Thinking of Traveling Outside of the U.S. for Medical Care?

Traveling outside of the country for medical care is called medical tourism.

Medical tourists seek medical, dental, or surgical treatments, to save money or to access treatments not available at home. But going to another country for medical care can have risks. Before you travel, learn about the risks and how to minimize them by being proactive, well-researched, and prepared.

Complications From Procedures Performed in Other Countries Include:

Getting Infected. Concerns include wound and bloodstream infections, donor-derived infections from transplantations or transfusions, and diseases such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV.

Drug Resistance. In certain countries, infections with antimicrobial-resistant germs are more common than in the US. Some healthcare facilities may lack infection control standards for testing, identifying, and responding to an outbreak.

Quality of Care. Some requirements for medical licenses and accreditation may be less than what would be required in the US. Fake medicines and lower-quality medical devices may be used.

Communication Challenges. Language differences and accents may be challenging and could lead to misunderstandings about your healthcare.

Air Travel. Flying after surgery can increase your risk of getting blood clots which are a serious health complication.

Minimize Your Risks By:

Researching Thoroughly. Check the provider's qualifications and the facility where the procedure will be done. Confirm that the healthcare facility you are visiting is accredited by checking with the Joint Commission International, Global Healthcare Accreditation, or the International Society for Quality in Healthcare.

Checking Before You Travel. Meet with your healthcare provider 4-6 weeks before your trip to discuss general travel health and procedure risks. Make sure your international travel health insurance covers medical evacuation to the U.S. If you're traveling to a country where you do not speak the language, pre-plan your communication strategies.

Maintaining Your Health Record. Take your medical records, allergy concerns, test results, and treatment details with you. Pack a travel health kit. Write a list of your medications with brand and generic names and dosages, carry them in original containers, and pack extra doses in case of travel delays. After your visit, obtain your new medical records in your language.

Planning for Aftercare. Delay air travel for 10-14 days after major surgeries. Know where you will be staying after the procedure. See if you can get follow-up care in the U.S. if you have medical problems after your trip. Some health insurance does not include follow-up care so supplemental travel health insurance may be needed.

Don't Forget: Let your provider know if you have traveled abroad for healthcare, even if you feel well.

Get Vaccinated

For the first time, vaccines are available for all three major fall and winter respiratory viruses: COVID-19, flu, and RSV.

Visit vaccines.gov for more information and to confirm your eligibility.

Get Tested

Widely available at-home antigen tests can help you detect a COVID-19 infection and prevent you from unknowingly spreading the virus to your loved ones.

Order yours at COVIDTests.gov

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Contact the Bureau of Epidemiology
Sign up to receive the quarterly Safe Travel Bulletin or to give topic ideas ra-pwsafetravel@pa.gov.