



BUFFALO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dr. Tonja M. Williams Superintendent of Schools

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Dear BPS Community,

Please see the below communication I just received from the Erie County Department of Health:

ERIE COUNTY, NY – The Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) and Kaleida Health are alerting local residents of a surge in pediatric respiratory illnesses. This is based on significant, sustained patient volume at John R. Oishei Children’s Hospital (OCH) Emergency Department and reported case data trends for RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) and influenza. This surge follows statewide and nationwide respiratory illness trends that are filling beds in pediatric hospitals, contributing to longer ED wait times, and increasing pressure on pediatricians’ offices, urgent care centers and ambulance services.

“Our emergency department is seeing a steady stream of children with acute respiratory symptoms,” **said Dr. Stephen Turkovich, Chief Medical Officer at John R. Oishei Children’s Hospital.** “Over the last week, we’ve seen approximately 190 patients per day in our emergency department – many of whom are experiencing breathing problems due to RSV and the flu, with the youngest patients experiencing the most severe symptoms.”

Since September 1, 2022, the number of patients admitted to OCH with RSV has exceeded 750, which is already double the number of patients admitted with RSV during the entire 2019-2020 respiratory season. Additionally, more than 1,500 children have tested positive for RSV in the OCH Emergency Department. An increasing number of patients tested positive for the flu over the last 10 days; nearly 40 children have been admitted to the hospital with the flu and over 350 have tested positive.

Parents and caregivers should consult with their child’s primary care doctor or pediatrician as a first course of action for a sick child. Hospital emergency departments are best reserved for those with life-threatening or acute medical conditions that require immediate and advanced medical intervention.

“The widespread use of masks as an infection prevention tool reduced RSV and flu levels during the past two winter seasons,” **said Commissioner of Health Dr. Gale Burstein.** “Without those preventive measures, these illnesses are back, and disproportionately affecting our community’s youngest residents. These are common viruses, but they can be uncommonly severe for infants and young children. It’s incumbent on each of us to take steps to maintain our own health and protect vulnerable people in our community.”

ECDOH and OCH are echoing the messages shared by the [New York State Department of Health](#) on protecting against the “triple threat” of respiratory illnesses this winter season: RSV, flu and COVID-19.

- Stay up to date with flu vaccines and COVID-19 vaccines.
- Stay home from school, work, daycare and other activities if you are sick.
- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth if you have symptoms of respiratory illness – coughing, stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat.
- Masking indoors and social distancing may be important for those who live with higher risk individuals: infants, older adults, pregnant people, and people born pre-term or those with underlying health conditions.
- Wash your hands often with soap and hot water for least 20 seconds to protect yourself from germs and avoid spreading them to others.
- Do not cough or sneeze into your hands. Instead, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Teach and remind children to do this, too.

“Putting Children and Families First to Ensure High Academic Achievement for All”

- Carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol to use when soap and water are not available.

Important websites for your information:

- Erie County Department of Health: www.erie.gov/health
- John R. Oishei Children's Hospital: www.ochbuffalo.org
- Find a flu vaccine location: www.vaccines.gov/find-vaccines
- New York State, Public Awareness Campaign to Protect NY Against Respiratory Illness: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-launches-public-awareness-campaign-protect-new-yorkers-against-respiratory>
- New York State Flu Tracker: <https://nyshc.health.ny.gov/web/nyapd/new-york-state-flu-tracker>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Flu: www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season.htm
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, RSV: www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html

Sincerely,



Dr. Tonja M. Williams
Superintendent of Schools