



“Tripledemic” - COVID-19, RSV, & the Flu



The “**Tripledemic**” is the possible outbreak of all three respiratory illnesses, the **flu** (influenza), the respiratory syncytial virus (**RSV**) and **COVID-19** at the same time this fall/winter.

Since the 2019 pandemic the SARS-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19) has learned to change and adapt. The COVID-19 virus doesn’t seem to be affected by the time of the year, and it looks like it will be with us for some time. Whereas the RSV and the flu virus tend to be seasonal in nature appearing in the fall and winter months.

All three of these respiratory viruses are transmitted by droplets when a person sneezes or coughs. In the fall and winter months people start spending more time indoors, in closer contact with each another making viruses easier to spread.

The RSV and the flu virus can also be spread by contacting contaminated surfaces. Meaning touching commonly used areas and objects such as doorknobs, light switches, shared computer keyboards, etc. then touching the face before washing the hands.

Regular handwashing and general cleaning of high traffic areas and surfaces will reduce the spread of all infectious viruses.

Vaccinations are the best way to reduce the possibility of becoming sick or hospitalized with one of these three viruses.

The flu vaccine is typically available during the September/October timeframe each year. The predominate flu strain this year appears to be Flu A. COVID-19 boosters are available year-round to children and adults.

The flu shot and the COVID-19 booster can be administered on the same day, in different locations on the body. About 10% of people reported mild reactions such as muscle soreness, fatigue, and headache as a result.

The RSV vaccine was approved in May 2023 and made available to anyone 60 years old and over. Pregnant women and children up to 24 months old are encouraged to get the vaccine. Everyone at any age can get RSV, not just infants.

Receiving all three vaccines at the same time is not recommended by the CDC. The RSV vaccine effectiveness seems to be reduced by the other two vaccine formulas. The suggestion is to receive the RSV vaccine on a different day when possible. Contact a primary care provider (PCP) or qualified healthcare provider to discuss which vaccines are best for each individual and to get more information.

Common Symptoms

When an individual is sick it is sometime hard to figure out which virus a person might have. The table below shows the typical symptoms for the flu, RSV, COVID-19 and the common cold.

	The Flu	RSV	COVID-19	Common Cold
Coughing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sneezing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing		✓	✓	
Fatigue	✓		✓	
Muscle or body aches	✓		✓	Sometimes
Headache	✓		✓	
New loss of taste or smell			✓	
Sore throat	✓		✓	✓
Congestion or runny nose	✓		✓	✓
Nausea or vomiting			✓	
Diarrhea			✓	
Decrease in appetite		✓		
Wheezing		✓		
Fever or feeling feverish/chills	✓	✓	✓	

If an individual is showing symptoms contact their PCP for guidance. If possible stay home and away from others when feeling sick and stay away from others who are showing signs of being sick.

It’s never a bad idea to wear a mask, and to social distance during cold and flu season. Also, remember to use good etiquette by covering those coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the elbow.

References
 1. [Kavanagh, K. \(2023, September\). How to prepare for possible 'triplede' of RSV, influenza, and sars-cov-2. Infection Control Today, 27\(7\), 1-9.](#)
 2. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\). \(2022a, October\). Symptoms of COVID-19.](#)
 3. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\). \(2022b, October\). Flu Symptoms & Complications: Cold vs. flu.](#)
 4. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\). \(2023, September\). Respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\): Symptoms and care.](#)

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Office of Integrated Health
Supports Network

ABA Snippets ...

Improving Caregiver Hand Hygiene

Handwashing and hand hygiene are behaviors, or better put multiple behaviors, that can be improved and increased. This was covered in last month's ABA Snippet (Include Hyperlink Here) and the November 2023 OIH Health and Safety Alert on Infection Control (3). These resources can help caregivers know how and when to wash their hands, but knowing is not the same as doing.

According to Bowman et al., 2019, multiple studies have noted, "Despite its importance, health care workers often fail to practice good hand hygiene practices and adherence to best practice guidelines remain poor" (p.600)(1).

Typical approaches to improving handwashing, including education/training, reminders/prompts, and environmental changes show minimal and/or short-term effectiveness. Combining these elements with continued feedback tends to be more effective. Adding prizes and recognition for staff who correctly follow hand hygiene policies increases the likelihood of long-term improvement (1).

This approach resembles Behavior Skills Training (BST) combined with positive reinforcement. BST is a step-by-step training protocol that includes instruction, modeling, rehearsal, and feedback. There is strong evidence supporting effectiveness of this approach (4). Positive reinforcement has proven its benefit for well over 50 years (2).

When a job skill like handwashing needs to be improved, education alone tends to fall short. Effective training programs and successful supervisors can benefit from using a BST approach that includes positive reinforcement. BST and positive reinforcement have been covered in previous issues of this newsletter (February 2021, July 2022, and March 2023) which can be found at <https://dbhds.virginia.gov/office-of-integrated-health/> for additional information and resources.

You may contact DBHDS to access resources, provide feedback, and learn more about these efforts via the following: nathan.habel@dbhds.virginia.gov

References

1. Bowman, B., Hardesty, S., Sigurdsson, S., Mclvor, M., Orchowit, P., Wagner, L., & Hagopian, L. (2019). Utilizing Group-Based Contingencies to Increase Hand Washing in a Large Human Service Setting. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 12, 600-611. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-018-00328-z>
2. Daniels, A., & Bailey, J. (2014). *Performance Management: Changing Behavior that Drives Organizational Effectiveness*. Aubrey Daniels International, Inc.
3. Office of Integrated Health (OIH). (2023, November). *Infection Control Health & Safety Alert*. The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, 1-21.
4. Reid, D., Parsons, M., & Green, C. (2012). *The Supervisor's Guidebook: Evidence-Based Strategies for Promoting Work Quality and Enjoyment Among Human Service Staff*. Habilitative Management Consultants, Inc.



App of the Month



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Health I.Q. is interactive, educational, and fun health trivia application. Race against the clock to earn points or use hints when you are stumped. Answer as many of the 10 questions correctly and as quickly as possible with the hopes of earning bonuses like A+ Student, Public Health Nerd, and Einstein or score poorly and earn the Hot Mess achievement! Available in Spanish. (App of the Month is not endorsed by DBHDS Office of Integrated Health-Health Supports Network. User accepts full responsibility for utilization of app).

Wheelchair Safety & Maintenance Tasks for Caregivers



Regular cleaning and maintenance can extend the life of a wheelchair and can help lower risk of injury to the wheelchair user.

General Maintenance and Safety Tasks

- If the wheelchair has removable leg rests, footrests, arm rests or back rests, check them and make sure they can be released and returned easily. If not, they may need to be repaired.
- If the wheelchair has a tilt feature, check to see if it reclines and returns upright without difficulty.
- Carefully check the axles, wheels, casters, and tires. Use a sharp tool or pick and carefully clean the wheel axle or caster bearing of any accumulation of hair, string or any other items that can interfere with the rotation of the wheels.
- Check each tire and make sure they are not deflated and have sufficient tread.
- Check the frame for any cracks or breaks in the metal, paying careful attention to areas that sustain significant stress, such as the cross-brace of a folding wheelchair and the caster housing. Any potential problems need to be reported to your wheelchair dealer/vendor for repairs.
- Check the wheelchair locks/brakes. Make sure they release properly, without having to use excessive force. Make sure they do not rub against the tire.
- If it is a folding wheelchair, ensure that it opens and folds easily. The folding mechanism requires lubrication at least once a year, more if you live in a humid or wet climate, where rust is more likely to form.
- Ball bearings will also need lubrication. Most manual wheelchairs have sealed bearings to discourage water and dirt from damaging them. Bearings require special care and should be serviced by a trained specialist.
- Check your wheel alignment monthly. If a chair tends to veer to one side while coasting, the wheels might be out of alignment.
- Developing a regular maintenance routine that involves cleaning, inspecting, and adjusting all critical components of a wheelchair and seating system is recommended. Usage, climate, environment, and wheelchair type all dictate how often a wheelchair needs to be serviced.