

For Immediate Release

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Protecting Your Health During Respiratory Illness Season

Polk County Public Health is reminding residents that respiratory illnesses, including influenza, COVID, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), are circulating in the community. Respiratory illness activity tends to increase during the fall and winter months and can lead to higher rates of illness, missed school and work, and increased demand on healthcare services.

Viruses that cause respiratory illnesses spread easily from person to person through coughs, sneezes, close contact, and contaminated surfaces. While many people experience mild symptoms and recover at home, respiratory illnesses can cause serious complications—especially for young children, older adults, pregnant individuals, and people with chronic medical conditions or weakened immune systems.

Preventing the spread of respiratory illnesses is one of the most effective ways to protect yourself, your family, and the community. Polk County Public Health encourages residents to take the following steps:

- Stay up to date on recommended vaccines that protect against respiratory illnesses
- Wash hands often with soap and water and use hand sanitizer when handwashing is not available.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or elbow.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when ill and return to school, work, or activities only after symptoms have improved and fever has been gone for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

Knowing the symptoms of respiratory illness and when to seek medical care is also important. Common symptoms may include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, fatigue, and chills. Most people can manage mild symptoms at home, but should contact a healthcare provider if symptoms are severe, worsen, or do not improve after a few days.

Seek medical care right away for symptoms such as difficulty breathing, chest pain, persistent high fever, confusion, dizziness, or signs of dehydration. Prompt medical attention is especially important for infants and young children, older adults, pregnant individuals, and those with underlying health conditions.

Polk County Public Health continues to monitor respiratory illness activity and works with healthcare providers and state partners to support prevention and education efforts. For more information on respiratory illnesses and prevention, residents can visit the Minnesota Department of Health website or contact Polk County Public Health at 218-281-3385.

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