



# Centre for Disease Control

NT HEALTH

## Public Health Alert

Issued: 23 December 2024  
Issued by: NT Centre for Disease Control  
Issued to: Health Practitioners

## Increase in COVID-19, Influenza, and RSV

### Summary

- Increased case numbers of COVID-19 disease are occurring across the NT and Australia-wide.
- Rising numbers of influenza cases are reported in the Top End and Australia-wide, with an increasing proportion of cases typed as influenza B.
- Increased case numbers of RSV infection are occurring in the Top End.
- Vaccination remains key to protecting the community. Ensure people recommended for COVID-19 boosters are up to-date as the new vaccine is now available, and promote the influenza vaccine to people not already vaccinated in 2024.
- Hand hygiene, wearing masks, and staying home when ill with respiratory symptoms are important preventative actions to stop the spread of these viruses.

### Current situation

- COVID-19, influenza, and RSV notifications have all increased in December in the NT, presenting a challenge to healthcare systems across the holiday season.
- Since 1 December, 162 cases of COVID-19 have been notified in the NT, a 35% increase compared to the previous 3 weeks with cases now increasing across Central Australia.
- Since mid-late November, a steady increase in RSV cases has been seen mostly in the Top End, particularly in Darwin. RSV infection in communities is often a prelude to influenza outbreaks.
- Since early December the Top End has seen an increase in influenza case that is expected to continue to rise. Notably, 34% of cases have been **influenza B**, which is a concern as earlier outbreaks of influenza this year have been almost exclusively influenza A and current community immunity to influenza B is likely to be low.
- Cases of COVID-19 and influenza (particularly influenza B) have also been increasing across Australia.

### Testing

- Offer testing for respiratory viruses to any patients presenting with flu-like symptoms, including runny nose, sore throat, cough, shortness of breath and fever.

### Treatment

- Consider antiviral medication for eligible COVID-19 and influenza patients to help prevent severe illness or hospitalisation.

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- Antivirals should be commenced as soon as possible, ideally within the first 5 days of symptoms to have the greatest effect.
- View the “COVID-19 Treatment of at Risk Adults and Adolescents not Requiring Oxygen” NT Health guideline [here](#), and our fact sheet on Oseltamivir [here](#).

## Vaccination

- **Vaccination remains the most effective means of preventing COVID-19 and influenza hospitalisations and deaths.**
- The 2024 influenza vaccine is still available and effective. Community immunity to influenza B is likely low. Influenza vaccine coverage has decreased in 2024, making more people at risk for influenza. Vaccination is the best way to protect individuals and their families.
- COVID-19 vaccines with the current variant of concern, JN.1, are now available to order.
- COVID-19 boosters are recommended for people 65 years and older. Those aged 18 years and older are eligible for annual boosters. More information about primary and booster dose eligibility is here: [COVID-19 vaccine advice for 2024](#)
- RSV vaccine is currently recommended and available on a private prescription for pregnant women and people aged 60 years and over. In early 2025 a funded maternal vaccination program will be available during pregnancy to protect babies during the first few months of life.

## Preventing Spread

- Encourage staff and patients to stay home from childcare, school, work, and places where there may be vulnerable people when experiencing respiratory symptoms. Remind everyone of good hand hygiene practices, and that wearing a mask helps protect from spreading respiratory illnesses.
- For NT Health staff, refer to the “COVID-19 Staff Exclusion” NT Health guideline ([internal link here](#)).
- There are currently no NT-wide policies or guidelines in effect for organisations and institutions about managing COVID-19 and influenza, however, information and resources are available on the NTG website ([Managing COVID-19 | NT Health - COVID-19](#)) and the NT CDC can be contacted for advice.

## Further information

- Contact the NT CDC for further information.

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