



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **State Agency Directors for IDPH and IDNR Visit Egyptian Health Department to Receive Flu and COVID-19 Shots**

*If You are Not Fully Protected from Flu and COVID-19, NOW is the Time*

**CHICAGO** – The Directors of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) appeared at a vaccination event today in Gallatin County in Southern Illinois to receive their seasonal flu and COVID-19 shots. While the IDPH [Seasonal Respiratory Illness Dashboard](#) shows the overall illness level in Illinois is currently Minimal, public health officials expect viral activity to increase as the holiday season and time for indoor gatherings nears.

“With the Thanksgiving Holiday fast approaching, I want to remind everyone that it takes about two weeks for vaccinations to provide their full level of protection,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra, who got his shots along with IDNR Director Natalie Phelps Finnie in a clinic in Junction, Illinois, that is operated by the Egyptian Health Department, which serves Gallatin, Saline and White counties. “I received my COVID-19 and flu vaccines today to ensure that I do all I can to protect myself and my loved ones from severe illness. If you haven’t already gotten your vaccines this season, now is a great time to visit your local pharmacy or clinic. Vaccinations are especially important for individuals over 65, those with chronic medical conditions, and those who are immunocompromised.”

The FDA and CDC have approved new vaccines for [COVID-19](#) and [flu](#) as well as updated who can receive the [RSV vaccines](#). The new COVID-19 flu shots are recommended for everyone over the age of 6 months. The RSV vaccine is recommended for everyone 75 years and older, as well as those 60 to 74 who are at increased risk for severe RSV. But if you got an RSV shot last winter, you do not need another at this time, according to the CDC. Those in the late stages of pregnancy are advised to get the RSV vaccine designed to protect newborns. Newborns whose mothers have not received the RSV vaccine, should receive nirsevimab between October and March.

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“As a former nurse practitioner who has prescribed vaccines for people and as a mother who ensures her own children get vaccinated, I believe it’s important that we follow the guidance recommended by the CDC,” said Director Phelps Finnie who is a resident of Hardin County. “Flu, COVID-19 and RSV can have life-threatening consequences for children and vulnerable adults, but we can lessen that risk by taking advantage of the vaccinations that are available to us.”

The IDPH respiratory illness dashboard shows that hospital admissions for COVID-19 are currently below 1 percent at 0.8% of admissions, according to data as of the week ending November 2. However, 12.5% of admissions are attributed to the broader category of Acute Respiratory Illness.

The dashboard reports the first pediatric death of the 2024-2025 respiratory virus season linked to COVID-19, underscoring that even children are susceptible to severe illness from both COVID-19 and the flu.

The Department has posted two helpful new FAQ documents on its website providing the [latest guidance on vaccinations](#) and how to [get tested and treated](#) for seasonal illnesses. In addition, the CDC has created a new [Respiratory Illness Data Channel](#) that provides nationwide county specific information that would be valuable for anyone planning to travel out of state.

Public health leaders stress one of the best ways to reduce transmission of viruses is to stay home when you are sick to reduce spread to others. Anyone with respiratory symptoms – such as coughing, a runny nose, or fever – should try to self-isolate from others, unless they need to seek medical care. If you cannot self-isolate, wear a well-fitted mask around others.

IDPH officials remind the public that if you do get a viral illness, there are effective anti-viral treatments available for COVID-19 and the flu, but they must be started quickly. This is why it is important to get tested if you are feeling symptoms.

For COVID-19, treatment must be prescribed by a healthcare provider and start within 5–7 days after symptoms appear. Treatment is strongly recommended for those who are over 65 or at higher risk for severe illness. Some Illinoisans should be eligible to access free oral antivirals through the [Paxcess](#) and [Merck Helps](#) programs.

Antiviral treatments for flu are most effective when given within 48 hours of starting to feel ill and are only available by prescription. Older adults, young children, and those who are pregnant or have conditions like diabetes, asthma and heart disease are at risk for complications and should contact a healthcare provider to be assessed for the need for treatment as soon as possible.

You can find locations that perform COVID-19 tests in person at no cost near you by using the [testing locator](#) for the federal ICATT (Increasing Community Access to Testing) program. The U.S. is offering free COVID-19 tests to every household through the [covidtests.gov](#) website.



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The new vaccines are widely available at pharmacies and through hospitals, and community health clinics. The major pharmacy chains allow you to make an appointment to get a shot online. For help finding a provider of vaccines near you, go to [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov).

For those who don't have healthcare coverage through a private plan, Medicare, or Medicaid, IDPH operates the Vaccines for Children Program, which provides vaccines at no cost for children 18 and under. Adults without insurance have several options. They can check with their local health department or contact a [free and charitable clinic](#) or a [Community Health Center](#).

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