

LIVINGSTON COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

2 Murray Hill Drive  
Mt. Morris, New York 14510-1691

Jennifer Rodriguez, M.S., M.S.W.  
Public Health Director

Phone (585) 243-7270  
Fax (585) 243-7287  
[dept-of-health@co.livingston.ny.us](mailto:dept-of-health@co.livingston.ny.us)  
[www.livingstoncounty.us/doh.htm](http://www.livingstoncounty.us/doh.htm)



*Administration & Fiscal:* (585) 243-7270/(585) 335-1716 Fax: (585) 243-7287  
*Dog Control:* (585) 243-6740/(585) 335-1720/ Fax: (585) 243-6751  
*Environmental Health:* (585) 243-7280/(585) 335-1717 Fax: (585) 243-6793  
*Patient Services:* (585) 243-7290/(585) 335-1719 Fax: (585) 243-6795  
*Preventive Services:* (585) 243-7299/(585) 335-1718 Fax: (585) 243-6794  
*Mental Health:* (585) 243-7250 Fax: (585) 243-7264

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*"Commitment to Leading The Community for a Healthier and Safer Tomorrow"*

## Talking Points For COVID-19

March 6, 2024

Effective March 4, 2024, the CDC has released unified Respiratory Virus Guidance (RVG) to fight three major viruses (COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)).

### Changes to COVID-19 "isolation" period:

The RVG recommends people stay home and away from others until at least 24 hours after:

- Symptoms have overall improved AND;
- They have not had a fever without using fever-reducing medication.

To be effective, this should be supplemented with strategies like: taking steps for cleaner air, enhancing hygiene practices (additional hand washing, covering coughs, etc.), wearing a well-fitting mask, social distancing, and virus testing once the stay at home period ends.

**Testing is an option** during the "stay home" period. COVID-19 at-home testing can give a rough approximation of whether someone is still infectious. However, at-home testing is not widely available for other respiratory illnesses and repeated testing throughout the course of an illness is not practical for many people.

### Core Prevention Strategies:

- Stay up to date with immunizations that are [recommended for you](#).
- Practice good hygiene; cover coughs and sneezes, wash/sanitize hands often, and clean frequently touched surfaces.
- Take steps for cleaner air; bring fresh air inside, purify indoor air, or spend time outdoors.
- When you have a respiratory virus:
  - Use precautions to prevent spread.
  - Seek health care promptly for testing and/or treatment if you have risk factors for severe illness; treatment may help lower risk of severe illness.

### Additional Prevention Strategies

- Masks

- Physical distancing
- Tests

**If you never had symptoms but tested positive for a respiratory illness**, you may be contagious. For the next five (5) days, use the precautions listed above when you will be around others indoors.

Following the RVG prevention strategies is also important when spending time around individuals with one or more risk factors for severe illness, such as: older adults, young children, people with weakened immune systems, people with disabilities, and pregnant people. For details by category, see the [full guidance](#) (pg. 13-24).

### Special Guidance for Health Care Personnel:

- COVID-19:
  - Encourage everyone to remain up to date with all recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses.
  - Establish a process to identify and manage individuals with suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection:
    - Ensure everyone is aware of recommended IPC practices in the facility.
    - Establish a process to make everyone entering the facility aware of recommended actions to prevent transmission to others if they have any of the following three criteria:
      - A positive viral test for SARS-CoV-2, or
      - Symptoms of COVID-19, or
      - Close contact with someone with SARS-CoV-2 infection (for patients and visitors) or a higher-risk exposure (for healthcare personnel (HCP)).
  - Implement source control measures for individuals in healthcare settings who:
    - Have suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection or other respiratory infection (e.g., those with runny nose, cough, sneeze); or
    - Had close contact or a higher-risk exposure with someone with SARS-CoV-2 infection, for 10 days after their exposure
  - For more details, visit: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html)
- Influenza:
  - The core prevention strategies include:
    - Administration of influenza vaccine.
    - Implementation of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
    - Appropriate management of ill HCP.
    - Adherence to infection control precautions for all patient-care activities and aerosol-generating procedures.
    - Implementing environmental and engineering infection control measures.
  - Standard Precautions:
    - Hand Hygiene - perform hand hygiene frequently, including before and after all patient contact, contact with potentially infectious material, and before putting on and upon removal of personal protective equipment, including gloves.
      - Hand hygiene in healthcare settings can be performed by washing with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rubs.
      - If hands are visibly soiled, use soap and water, not alcohol-based hand rubs.

- Gloves - Wear gloves for any contact with potentially infectious material. Remove gloves after contact, followed by hand hygiene.
    - Do not wear the same pair of gloves for care of more than one patient.
    - Do not wash gloves for the purpose of reuse.
  - Gowns - Wear gowns for any patient-care activity when contact with blood, body fluids, secretions (including respiratory), or excretions is anticipated. Remove gown and perform hand hygiene before leaving the patient's environment.
    - Do not wear the same gown for care of more than one patient.
  - Adhere to Droplet Precautions - Droplet precautions should be implemented for patients with suspected or confirmed influenza for 7 days after illness onset or until 24 hours after the resolution of fever and respiratory symptoms, whichever is longer, while a patient is in a healthcare facility.
- For a complete list of standard precautions, visit:  
[www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/healthcaresettings.htm#:~:text=Droplet%20precautions%20should%20be%20implemented,is%20in%20a%20healthcare%20facility.](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/healthcaresettings.htm#:~:text=Droplet%20precautions%20should%20be%20implemented,is%20in%20a%20healthcare%20facility.)

### **New Evidence to Support this Guidance:**

We have improved tools to fight serious respiratory illness:

- Effective vaccines against all three viruses are now widely available:
  - COVID-19 vaccines cut the risk of severe disease in half and over 95% of hospitalized adults were not up to date with their COVID vaccine in fall 2023.
  - Flu vaccines cut the risk of severe disease by close to half.
  - For the first time in fall 2023, we had an immunization against RSV for older adults, pregnant people, and young children.
- As a result, far fewer people are getting seriously ill from COVID-19.
  - Weekly hospital admissions are down more than 75% from the Omicron wave in January 2022. Deaths are down by more than 90%.
  - Complications like long COVID and multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) in children are less common.

There is also a high degree of population immunity against COVID-19, with more than 98% of the U.S. population having some degree of protective immunity from vaccination, prior infection, or both.

While still a significant health threat to those at higher risk, COVID-19 health impacts are now increasingly similar to other respiratory illnesses. The Respiratory Virus Guidance is meant to bring an easy-to-understand, practical, unified approach to protecting against common viral illnesses. It is important to remember that COVID-19 still differs from other respiratory illnesses due to issues like post-COVID conditions.