

ADVISORY

FROM THE COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

WHEREAS, on March 25, 2020, the New York City Commissioner of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) declared a public health emergency within the City to address the threat posed by COVID-19 to the health and welfare of City residents, and such declaration and public health emergency continue to be in effect; and

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is a high level of respiratory viruses nationally, specifically COVID-19, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and influenza (flu), with the highest levels of hospitalization from the flu in over a decade for this time of year, and an estimated 8.7 million illnesses, 78,000 hospitalizations, and 4,500 deaths from flu so far this season (based on data through November 26, 2022); and COVID-19 hospitalization have been steadily increasing in the last three weeks; and

WHEREAS, there are several indications of increased incidence of respiratory viruses in New York City: flu cases have been increasing since the week ending October 29, 2022, which is several weeks earlier than recent flu seasons, and for week ending November 26, 2022, flu-like illness made up 12% of all weekly emergency department visits in NYC; and RSV reports remain substantially elevated over previous years; and, over the last two weeks of November, the 7-day average of COVID-19 reported cases and hospitalizations increased by 29% and 26%, respectively; the combined impact of these respiratory illnesses risks straining our healthcare system; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19, flu, RSV, and other respiratory infections are transmitted predominantly by inhalation of respiratory droplets that contain the virus, or those droplets entering the eyes, nose, or mouth, and masks can reduce both the amount of respiratory droplets that enter the air by the wearer and the wearer's exposure to droplets from others; and

WHEREAS, respiratory viruses spread more easily indoors due to reduced ventilation, and in crowded spaces due to people being closer together and the increased likelihood that someone in the space is infected with a virus and able to transmit it to others; and

WHEREAS, the CDC advises all people to take proven public health measures to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses, which may include wearing a well-fitting mask, practicing good hand hygiene, improving ventilation, staying home when sick, staying up to date with vaccines, increasing space and distance, avoiding crowded spaces, cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated, and getting testing and treatment as appropriate; and

WHEREAS, masks are required in health care and certain congregate settings in New York State;

THEREFORE, YOU ARE HEREBY PROVIDED NOTICE THAT:

1. Everyone, even if vaccinated and even if they have had COVID-19 or flu before, should wear a mask as follows:
 - a. Wear a mask at all times when in an indoor public setting, including inside stores, offices, lobbies, hallways, elevators, public transportation, schools, child care facilities, and other public shared spaces, and when in a crowded outdoor setting.

- b. Wear a mask if sick and unable to separate from others, such as when traveling to and from a health care provider, picking up groceries, and when in shared living spaces.
 - c. For people who have tested positive for COVID-19, per CDC and New York State guidance, in addition to isolating at home for at least 5 days, wear a mask at all times whenever in public or around other people for at least 10 days after their symptoms began (or, if they had no symptoms, for 10 days after their test date).
2. People who are at increased risk of severe illness from one or more respiratory viruses, including people 65 years and older, infants, people with a weakened immune system, people with certain underlying medical conditions, people who are pregnant, and people who are not up to date on their flu or COVID-19 vaccinations, should consider taking additional precautions to avoid exposure to respiratory viruses. This may include, for example, limiting attendance at large indoor gatherings, wearing a mask when gathering with others, and asking people to wear a mask and get a COVID-19 test prior to gathering. People who are at increased risk of severe illness, especially those 65 years and older, should talk to their health care provider immediately after they become sick or test positive, given the significant benefit of COVID-19 and flu treatment.
3. All masks should fully cover the nose and mouth and rest snugly above the nose, below the mouth, and on the sides of the face. Higher-quality masks, such as KN95 and KF94 masks and N95 respirators, can offer an additional layer of protection. Wearing a cloth mask over a disposable mask and knotting the ear loops to tighten masks are additional techniques to improve fit and protection.
4. In addition to wearing a high-quality mask as described above, everyone should take the following precautions:
 - a. Stay up to date on their COVID-19 and flu vaccinations, even if they have been vaccinated against these viruses previously. For COVID-19, all eligible people should get the updated bivalent booster shot, even if they have had COVID-19 or received COVID-19 booster shots previously.
 - b. Get tested for COVID-19 and flu right away if they have symptoms, and, in addition, get tested for COVID-19 before and after travel or large gatherings, before visiting someone at high risk for complications for COVID-19, and 5 days after being exposed to someone with COVID-19 (or sooner if symptoms develop).
 - c. Stay home if sick (and do not send children to school or day care if they are sick) and avoid close contact with others.
 - d. Follow good hand hygiene, including washing their hands often or using hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available; not touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; and covering their coughs and sneezes with the arm or a tissue.
 - e. Contact their health care provider if they have symptoms of respiratory illness – including cough, congestion or other signs of a cold – to find out whether they need testing, care, or treatment. In case of emergency, people should call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.
5. The mask advisory applies to all individuals in New York City ages two years and older who can medically tolerate wearing a mask. The mask advisory does not apply when an individual is performing an activity that cannot be done while wearing a mask such as actively eating or drinking.

Dated: December 9, 2022