



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Ashwin Vasani, MD, PhD
Commissioner

2024 Health Advisory #1: NYC DOHMH Recommends Masking In Healthcare and Residential Facilities

January 17, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Please see below the New York State Health Advisory recommending masking in healthcare and residential facilities due to increases in COVID-19 and influenza cases. In New York City (NYC), COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have been increasing since early November 2023. Between December 16 and 31, 2023, the city saw 1,776 COVID-19 hospitalizations and 69 COVID-19 deaths.

JN.1, a SARS-CoV-2 omicron sub-variant related to BA.2.86, was first detected in the U.S. in September 2023 and as of late December, comprised almost half of all sequenced cases in NYC. Although existing vaccines, tests and treatments still work well against JN.1, its rapid and continued growth suggests that it may be more transmissible and/or more immune evasive than other recent circulating variants. Citywide, influenza cases and emergency department influenza-like-illness visits have been increasing since November. While citywide respiratory syncytial virus cases have declined in recent weeks, activity remains high.

The high levels of these respiratory viruses may increase strain on healthcare and residential facilities. We strongly recommend that all NYC healthcare and congregate residential facilities implement policies requiring facility-wide masking of all staff and personnel to interrupt respiratory virus transmission and maintain a healthy workforce.

Additional Resources:

- <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page>
- <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/hcp/weekly-surveillance12302023.pdf>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/SARS-CoV-2-variant-JN.1.html>



Department of Health

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Commissioner

JOHANNE E. MORNE, M.S.
Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner

January 8, 2024

TO: Healthcare Providers, Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Adult Care Facilities, Pharmacists, and Local Health Departments

FROM: NYSDOH

HEALTH ADVISORY:

NYS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOMMENDS MASKING IN HEALTHCARE AND RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

Please distribute immediately to the Infection Control Department, Emergency Department, Infectious Disease Department, Director of Nursing, Medical Director, Director of Pharmacy, Administrator, Director of Resident Services, Laboratory Director, and all inpatient and outpatient care areas.

Purpose

The purpose of this advisory is to alert healthcare providers and facilities to substantial increases in cases of influenza and COVID-19, at least partially driven by an emerging SARS-CoV-2 variant, and to recommend that healthcare and residential facilities advocate strongly for the use of masks within their facility to prevent transmission and ensure a healthy workforce.

Background

Current COVID-19 and Influenza data

- From December 17, 2023, to January 2, 2024, there were 7,847 new COVID-19 hospital admissions reported to NYS Department of Health.
 - For more information on the current state of COVID-19 in New York:
<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-data-new-york>
- From December 17 to December 30 there were 3,497 new influenza-related hospitalizations reported to NYS Department of Health. Each of the past two weeks has shown greater than 30% increases week over week in reported influenza cases.
 - For more information on the current state of influenza in New York:
health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/surveillance/
- In NYS, the convergence of sharply increasing COVID-19 and influenza rates may stress already overburdened healthcare facilities.

Variant Information

- The JN.1 SARS-CoV-2 lineage emerged late in 2023 as a descendant of the BA.2.86 lineage.
- This variant has been shown to be less effectively neutralized by antisera against BA.2.86 or XBB.1.5. (Kako, Lancet ID 2024, Yang, Lancet ID 2023).
- Overall, the JN.1 lineage has demonstrated a level of infectivity and immune evasion significantly higher than strains that have been circulating in the past year.

Recommendations

Considering the above information, the Department recommends that all healthcare and residential facilities in NYS institute a facility-wide masking policy. The policy should apply to all personnel while working in areas where patients/residents/clients may be present. "Personnel" in the context of this recommendation means all persons employed or affiliated with a healthcare or residential facility or agency, whether paid or unpaid, including but not limited to employees, members of the medical and nursing staff, contract staff, students, and volunteers. Visitors should also be encouraged to wear a mask while in the facility.

Facilities should periodically review the need for the policy based on trends in disease transmission.

- Additional information about the JN.1 variant can be found at:
 - [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(23\)00813-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(23)00813-7/fulltext)
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/SARS-CoV-2-variant-JN.1.html>

For questions about this advisory, please write to icp@health.ny.gov