

Respiratory Illness Season Preparedness Fireside Chat

October 2025
Co-hosted by: OARC

Ministry of Long-Term Care
Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health

Land Acknowledgement

Together, let us now pause as we acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands that we are on today, from wherever we are virtually participating in today's meeting. Let us take a moment to acknowledge the importance of the land we each call home.

We do this to affirm our commitment and responsibility to improving relationships between nations, and to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous Peoples and their cultures.

We acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people who call this nation home.

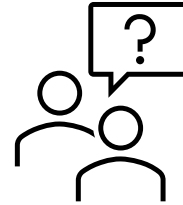
Let us now join in a moment of reflection to acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past and to consider how each of us, in our own way, can move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

Webinar Housekeeping



Chat Box

The Chat feature is **disabled** during this session.



Question Box

Type questions in the Q&A box.
We will answer as many as possible during the presentation.



Recording

A recorded version of this webinar will be available on OARC's website.
www.ontarc.com



Evaluation

After the webinar, a pop-up screen asking you to complete a survey will appear. Your feedback and suggestions are appreciated.

Agenda

Topic	Time	Lead Speakers
2025-26 Respiratory Season Overview	15 min	• Dr. Mary Choi
2025-26 Respiratory Season Immunization Program Overview	15 min	• Dr. Daniel Warshafsky
Q&A	30 min	All: Moderated by OARC

2025-26 Respiratory Season Overview

Respiratory Season Overview

- As we head into the **fall and winter** months, respiratory **viruses like influenza, RSV, and COVID-19** begin to **circulate more actively** throughout the community.
 - In Ontario, respiratory viruses are **typically most active between November and April**, with some variation between seasons and viruses.
- These viruses **spread easily from person to person** through activities like coughing, sneezing, and talking.
 - A person can spread a virus to others even before they notice any symptoms.

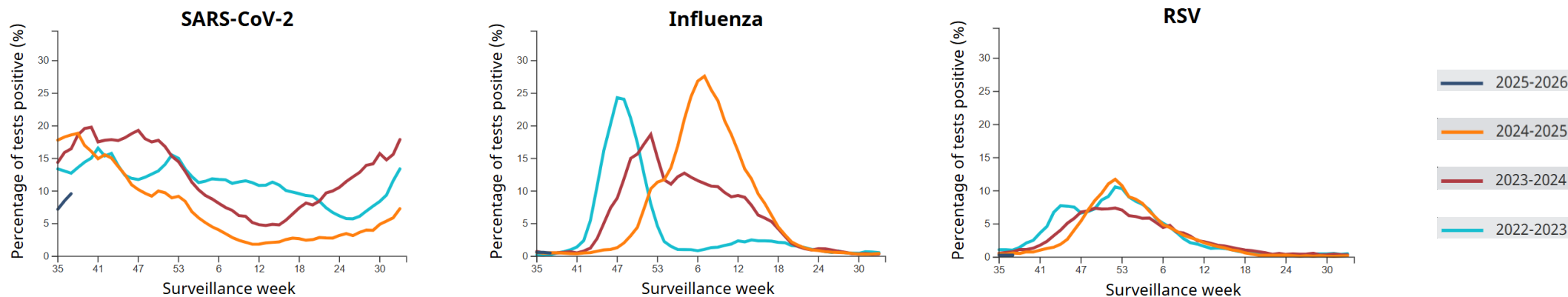
Common symptoms seen with respiratory virus infections

Symptoms of respiratory infections range from mild to severe, and may include one or more of the following:

- Fever or chills
- Coughing and/or sneezing
- Shortness of breath
- Runny nose or nasal congestion
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches or joint pain
- Delirium/confusion
- *Vomiting and diarrhea*
(more so in younger children)

What to Expect for the 2025/26 Respiratory Season

- At this time, we expect the respiratory season this year to be **similar to the previous two seasons** and **similar to pre-pandemic year respiratory seasons**:
 - COVID-19** continues to circulate, with waves occurring in both winter and summer as new dominant strains emerge.
 - Influenza** and **RSV** patterns are gradually returning to more “typical” respiratory seasons, with peaks in February and December, respectively.
 - Other common respiratory viruses are also expected to circulate.



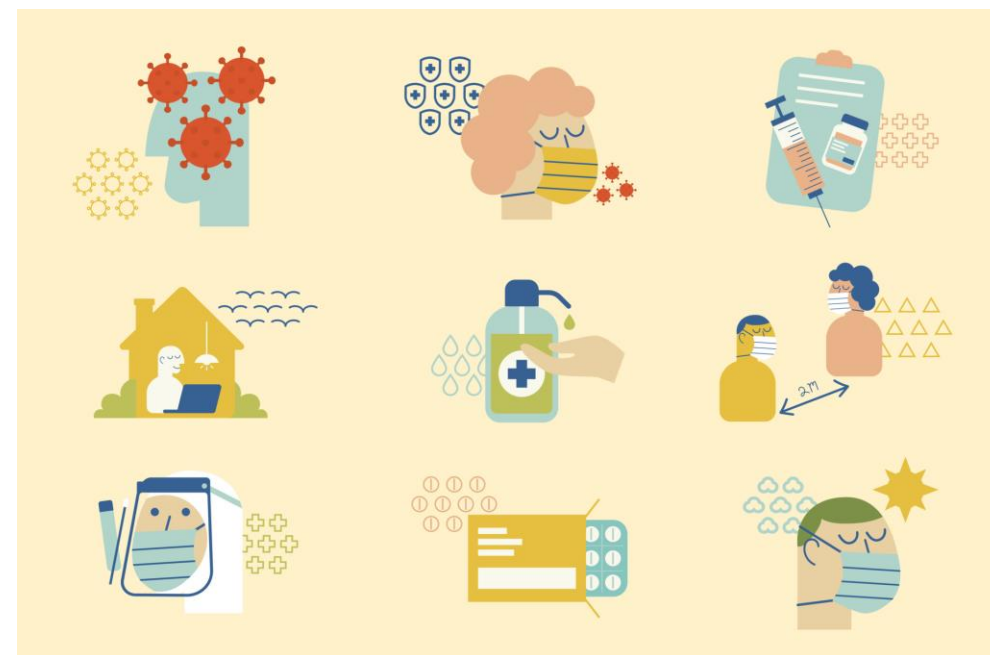
- However, there is still a **risk of atypical timing of peaks of activity** and **potential for increased impact on vulnerable populations**.

Respiratory Virus Infection in Older Adults and Long-Term Care Homes

- Long-term care homes are vibrant and social environments where **many staff, caregivers, and other visitors come and go each day**. As respiratory viruses become more widespread in the community, **the risk of those viruses entering the home** and impacting the residents also increases.
- While anyone can get sick, some groups of people have higher chances of developing **severe illness and complications**, including older adults and those with underlying medical conditions.
- These **complications** can include:
 - Worsening of chronic health conditions, such as underlying heart, lung, kidney, and neurological conditions
 - Heart complications, like arrhythmia and heart failure exacerbations
 - Pneumonia and respiratory failure
 - Hospitalizations
 - Death

Staying Healthy and Safe During Respiratory Season

- **Everyone has a role to play in keeping the home and its community safe** – good IPAC practices are for everyone!
- **Residents** and **caregivers** can protect themselves and one another by:
 - Staying up to date with their **vaccines**
 - Notifying staff if a resident is **feeling unwell**
 - **Washing their hands**
 - **Covering their mouth/nose** when sneezing/coughing
 - Wearing a **mask** (if possible)
 - **Communicating** with the home re: resident's goals and care needs
 - For caregivers – **avoiding visits when sick** if possible
 - **Following the directions** of the staff and public health in an outbreak



Outbreak Response and Management

- A **respiratory infection outbreak** in a home means that there are **two or more residents** who **develop respiratory symptoms** within a short time frame and we think the **infection was spread among these ill residents**.
 - Example: symptomatic residents share a room or participated in an activity together
- **During an outbreak, the home will take measures under the direction of public health in order to:**
 - Prevent additional residents, staff, caregivers from getting sick
 - Ensure that the residents continue to receive care
 - Identify and address factors that contributed to the outbreak
- **All homes are required to report** suspected/confirmed outbreaks of respiratory illnesses to their local Public Health Unit and to the Ministry of Long-Term Care.

What to Expect When a Resident is Sick

If you are feeling sick, please **notify** a home staff as soon as you are concerned.



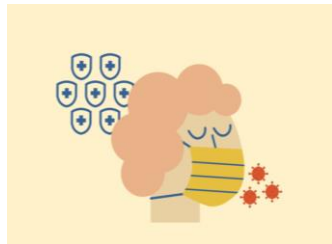
If you are feeling sick, a health care provider will obtain a sample from you for **testing**.

You should **stay in your room** and **avoid communal activities** while you're sick.



If the you or others test positive for COVID-19 or the flu, you may be offered **medications** to help you fight the virus.

If you are receiving care or sharing communal space with others, you are encouraged to wear a **mask** where possible.



Remember to practice **respiratory etiquette** and **wash your hands**, especially after coughing or sneezing.

2025/26 Respiratory Season Immunization Program Overview

Immunizations for the 2025/26 Respiratory Season

- Immunizations are **safe, effective**, and are the best way to remain **protected against the most severe outcomes** of infection, including hospitalization and death.
- To protect against serious illness throughout the upcoming respiratory illness season, it is recommended that all LTCH residents and staff get their **COVID-19** and **flu shots** as soon as they are available.
- It is also recommended that all eligible LTCH residents receive their **RSV vaccine** this fall if they did not receive it in previous years.
- Don't forget about routine immunizations, like the measles and the pneumococcal vaccine!



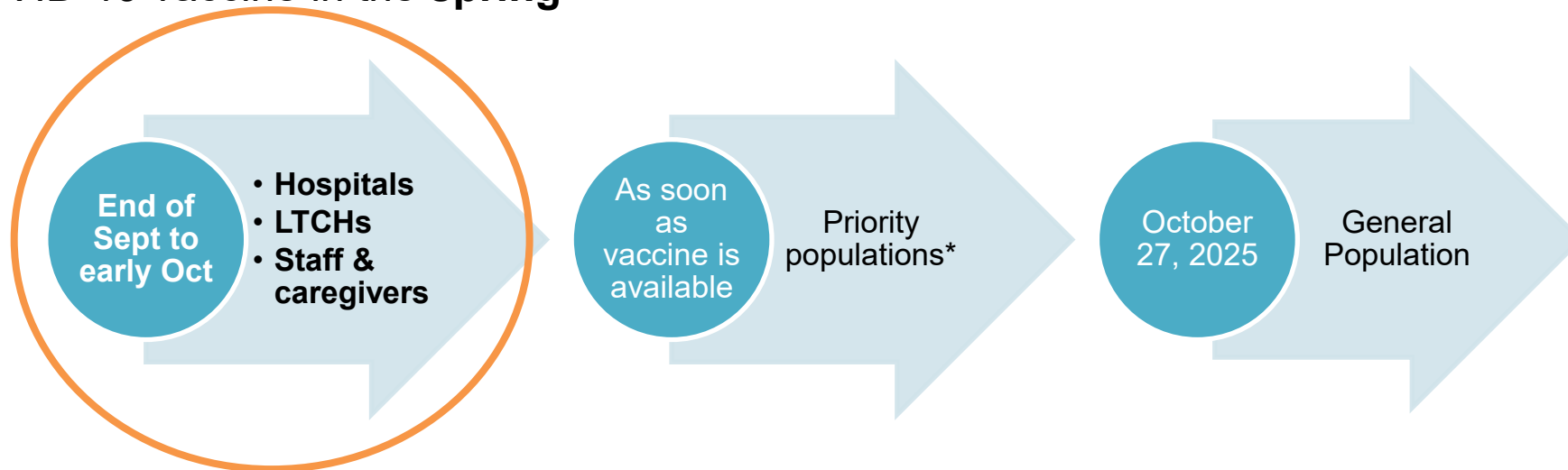
2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

[2024 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health - Protecting Tomorrow: The Future of Immunization in Ontario](#)

2025/26 COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccines

- All long-term care home residents, staff, and care providers (including caregivers) are strongly recommended to receive their updated COVID-19 and annual influenza vaccines vaccine when they are available for this respiratory season.
- **Note for COVID-19 vaccines** – updated this season to provide optimum protection against circulating strains
 - You can receive your COVID-19 vaccine if it has been at least 3 months since your last COVID-19 vaccine OR your last test- confirmed COVID-19 infection
 - Long-term care home residents are also strongly recommended to receive **another dose** of the COVID-19 vaccine in the **spring**



High-Risk Older Adults RSV Immunization Program

- First introduced during the 2023/24 respiratory season
 - Expanded eligibility this year to include adults aged 75 and older who live in the community
- The RSV vaccine in older adults has been demonstrated to be **safe** and **effective**
 - It has been demonstrated to reduce RSV-infection related hospitalization rates in older adults by 70-80%
- **Products:** Arexvy (GSK) and Abrysvo (Pfizer) - both products were used in previous years
- Long-term care home residents remain eligible to receive a publicly funded dose of the RSV vaccine if they have not received one already.
- **If an individual previously received a dose of RSV vaccine, they do not need to receive another dose** – a single dose offers multi-year protection.

- **Respiratory season vaccines can be given at the same time (co-administered) – it is safe and convenient!**
- RSV vaccine can also be co-administered with both seasonal and non-seasonal vaccines.
 - Concurrent administration of the RSV vaccine to adults 60 years of age and older with other recommended vaccines can be considered in alignment with basic vaccine principles.
- **We encourage residents to receive COVID-19 and the flu vaccines at the same time when possible!**

Key Messages

- **Respiratory infections** (like the common cold, the flu, COVID-19) are **more common in fall/winter and spread easily between people**, even when they don't look like they're sick.
- **We all can take action to protect ourselves** and help keep one another safe and healthy this respiratory season.
- Outbreaks can happen, and when they do, make sure to **follow the directions of the home and public health** to prevent others from getting sick.
- **Staying up to date with your immunizations** is the safest and most effective way to stay healthy and reduce your chances of needing to go to the hospital this respiratory season.
 - **All residents and caregivers are strongly recommended to receive a dose of COVID-19 and flu vaccines this fall as soon as they become available.**
 - All residents should also receive a dose of the RSV vaccine this fall if they have not received one before.
 - All residents are also strongly recommended to receive a dose of COVID-19 vaccine in the spring when they become available.

Fireside Chat and Q&A





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