

Viral Respiratory Illness Planning and Response for Institutions of Higher Education

Institutions of higher education (IHE) can support safe, in-person learning while implementing recommendations to reduce the spread of viral respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19. This guidance provides recommendations informed by the CDC ([Protect yourself and others from Flu, COVID-19, and RSV \[www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/index.html\]](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/index.html)) and flexibility to allow for changing local situations, including periods of increased community health impacts from [Viral Respiratory Illness in Minnesota \(Data & Statistics\) \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/respiratory/stats/index.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/respiratory/stats/index.html).

Management of cases and exposures

Although case investigation and contact tracing for viral respiratory illness in IHE are no longer routinely recommended, students, faculty, and staff should notify their close contacts when they have symptoms of or test positive for a viral respiratory illness such as COVID-19, flu, or RSV.

IHE should provide instructions to students, faculty, and staff members who have symptoms of, or test positive for, a respiratory illness such as COVID-19, flu, or RSV (e.g., stay home and away from others when you have symptoms, get tested if indicated, follow prevention recommendations).

If a person has respiratory symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, flu, RSV, or another respiratory illness, they should remain at home and away from others (including people they live with who are not sick). They can return to normal activities when, for at least 24 hours, both are true:

- Their symptoms are getting better overall, **and**
- They have not had a fever (and are not using fever-reducing medication)
- When returning to normal activities, additional precautions should be taken over the next 5 days, such as increasing handwashing and hygiene, wearing a mask, practicing physical distancing while around others, and/or testing when they will be around others indoors.

For more detailed guidance, visit:

- [CDC: Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You're Sick \(www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html)
- [Protect Yourself & Others: Sick, recovering, or exposed to COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#sick\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#sick)

Shared housing and preventing spread

Except for certain situations involving those at high risk of severe disease, IHE settings should follow the general population guidance for isolation at home found in *Management of cases and exposures* above.

Students at high risk for severe disease may wish to make housing accommodations prior to the start of a term to reduce their risk. Students may choose to apply for an on-campus private room or to secure a private room or residence off campus. Additionally, these students should be provided with information on how to access medication for COVID-19, visit [COVID-19 Medication \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html).

Recommended services and accommodations for IHE students while sick

All students

- Alternative modes of course instruction and accommodations, such as additional time to complete course work.

Students living on campus

- Access to a phone, meals, and laundry services.
- Supplies, such as a thermometer, masks, sanitizing wipes, tissues, soap, hand sanitizer, toiletries, and medications.
- Contact information for emergencies and for accessing medical resources on campus or in the community, including testing.

Prevention strategies

In addition to basic health and hygiene practices, some prevention actions apply at all viral respiratory hospital admission levels, ([Viral Respiratory Illness in Minnesota \[Data & Statistics\] \[www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/respiratory/stats/index.html\]](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/respiratory/stats/index.html)).

- **Vaccination:** Vaccination is one of the core strategies for lowering respiratory illness risk and preventing viral spread.
[Immunizations for Respiratory Viruses Prevention \(www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/immunizations.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/immunizations.html)
- **Mask use:** Wearing a mask is an additional prevention strategy that you can choose to further protect yourself and others. For when to wear a mask and types of masks for better protection, visit:
[Masks and Respiratory Viruses Prevention \(www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/masks.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/masks.html)
- **Testing:** Testing is also a prevention strategy that can assist in making decisions to protect yourself and others. Learn more about when and where to test:
[COVID-19 Testing \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/testsites/index.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/testsites/index.html)

- **Medication information for those at high risk of severe disease:**
 - Learn more at [COVID-19 Medication \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html).
 - You can find information on conditions that place people at higher risk of severe disease, at [CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).
- **Ventilation:** Maintain improved ventilation throughout indoor spaces when possible, including opening windows and doors. For resources on improving ventilation, visit:
 - [Indoor Air Considerations: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/indoorair.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/indoorair.html)
 - [CDC: Ventilation in Buildings \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/ventilation.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/ventilation.html)

Minnesota Department of Health
625 Robert Street North
PO Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
651-201-5414
www.health.state.mn.us

7/9/24

To obtain this information in a different format, contact: 651-201-5414.