
Maura J. Rossman, M.D., Health Officer

November 2, 2022

Dear Howard County Community,

Since August, COVID case rates, test positivity, and new hospital admissions due to COVID have continued to trend downward. The COVID Community Level is LOW. As a reminder, Community Levels are categorized as low, medium, and high based on the number of COVID-19 cases in a given community and the impact of severe disease on community-based healthcare systems. The Omicron subvariant known as BA.5 remains the most dominant, with subvariants slowly increasing in Maryland. While COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths remain lower than earlier in the year, we do expect an increase in the coming months. To prevent serious illness, continue with the strategies we have learned over the past 2 ½ years. These strategies include vaccination, masking, testing, isolating when sick, and use of medications when prescribed. CDC recommends everyone 6 months and older stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines and get the bivalent booster when eligible.

While the COVID Level is currently LOW, our community is seeing a significant increase in other viruses that are especially impacting children. Influenza (flu) and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) are causing many young children to develop severe respiratory disease requiring emergency room treatment and hospitalization. Our Maryland pediatric hospitals are experiencing a surge in patients causing some children to be transported to other states for care. Schools are seeing high absenteeism due to these viruses among older children. To help keep you and your families healthy and out of the hospital, follow these strategies:

- Annual flu vaccination for everyone 6 months and older offers the best protection against flu and its potentially serious complications, especially among individuals with certain chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes, and heart conditions.
- If you or a family member is immunocompromised or high risk for severe disease:
 - Wear a mask that provides you and them greater protection when in public or group settings.
 - Consider avoiding non-essential crowded indoor activities where exposures can occur.
 - Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you or your family member are a candidate for treatments like oral antivirals, and monoclonal antibodies if you become sick or if you are exposed to someone who is sick.
- Have a plan in case you or a family member become sick or get exposed:
 - Stay home from work and school if symptomatic and get tested for COVID-19 with a PCR or a rapid antigen test. Ask your medical provider if testing is recommended for other viruses like flu or RSV.
 - If you test positive, ask your medical provider about medications to treat your illness.



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- Remember Respiratory Etiquette:
 - Use a tissue to cover your sneezes and coughs.
 - Sneeze or cough into your sleeve if you do not have a tissue.
 - Clean your hands often.
- Cleaning and Sanitizing:
 - Clean high touch surfaces at least once a day using soap and water.
 - Sanitize or disinfect surfaces with an EPA approved product to reduce and kill viruses and bacteria if someone is sick at home.

Thank you for your support and continued commitment to health,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Maura J. Rossman MD'.

Maura J. Rossman, MD
Howard County Health Officer