

Informed Today, Healthier Tomorrow

Reported from North Carolina, USA Vol. 1, No. 1

Dear Partners in Health,

Currently the amount of respiratory illness causing people to see their provider is very high. Seasonal influenza is at an all season high and increasing. Influenza hospitalization rates have surpassed COVID-19. Wastewater viral levels for COVID-19 are high and continue to increase although emergency room visits for COVID-19 are low and decreasing. Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) wastewater viral levels are low and emergency room visits are also decreasing. Influenza vaccination reporting rates are 45% for adults/children and 70% for older adults 65+. Early reports appear that the influenza vaccine effectiveness this year is reducing hospitalization by about 35%. That's lower than the 42% last season but still within an acceptable range. Vaccines continue to be the most effective way to decrease serious illness from respiratory viruses.

Current Health
U.S. Life Expectancy 78.5 years
Respiratory Illness Risk
Flu (very high, increasing)
COVID-19 (high, increasing)
RSV (low, decreasing)
Measles (61 cases)
Bird Flu (68 cases)

Measles

Measles outbreaks are making headlines in Texas. There are 48 new reported cases this week and none reported being vaccinated. The CDC is reporting 14 cases Texas, Alaska, New Mexico, Georgia, Rhode Island and New York City. For comparison there were 285 cases reported in 2024 nationwide. Measles is highly contagious spread by respiratory droplets infecting others who are near an infected person who coughs, sneezes, or talks. The infection usually results in a rash, fever, red eyes and cough. Sometimes resulting in blindness, pneumonia or swelling of the brain. The illness weakens the immune system for months to years causing an "immune amnesia" where the body forgets previously immunity to other pathogens, resulting in high risk of severe illness from infections previously encountered. Persons also have increased risk of permanent lung damage and increased risk for chronic respiratory illness later in life. In young children measles can lead to permanent intellectual disabilities, delayed development and behavioral problems. If unvaccinated persons are exposed the infection rate is 90%. Washing hands and wearing a mask offers some protection but the best prevention is the MMR (measles, Mumps, and Rubella) vaccine.

WHO

The United States reinstated its withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO). President Trump originally gave notice of withdrawal in 2020, citing mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, "inappropriate political influence" among WHO member states, and unfair payment demands "out of proportion with other countries". The United States contributes approximately 18% of the WHO funding. The original order was retracted by

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President Biden in 2021 and has now been reinstated January 20, 2025. The WHO does many things; a vital service to Americans is its role in detection, monitoring, and responding to infectious diseases. National Security Advisor Mike Waltz will be assigned this duty in the future. There is concern that withdrawal from WHO will negatively affect global health disease programs fighting HIV, polio, mpox and avian flu.

Spending

The United States spent \$3.8 trillion in 2019 and projected to spend \$7 trillion in 2031. Knowing how healthcare resources are utilized helps to guide policymaking, identify research gaps, and resource needs. The most current research found 3-fold spending variations by location even after adjusting for age and population. The largest differences in cost were attributed to variations in healthcare utilization. Diabetes Type 2 accounted for the highest spending costs (\$144 billion). Exploration and understanding of these findings could facilitate change to improve healthcare quality and decrease expenditures.

Sleep

Optimal physical and mental health is significantly dependent on the quality of sleep. Wearable technology devices have become more popular to monitor sleep duration, stages, and quality. While most people do well on 6-8 hours of sleep, some function optimally on less than 6 hours, and some will need 10 or more hours to wake up feeling refreshed and performing optimally. Disturbances in the quality of sleep usually result in needing longer sleep. Symptoms of poor sleep include difficulty staying awake, brain fog, feeling sad, anxious, or irritable. Lifestyle changes that promote healthy sleep include a regular sleep schedule, avoiding caffeine, smoking, exercise, alcohol, and any stimulant in the evening. Keep the bedroom dark, quiet, and calm. Avoid daytime naps greater than 20 minutes. Consider relaxation techniques before bedtime. One should seek professional healthcare advice if having difficulty and can't figure out ways to improve sleep quality.

Bird Flu

Bird flu (avian influenza) is a respiratory illness that commonly spreads among geese, ducks, and gulls, it can also spread to domestic birds like chickens and mammals like cows. Rarely, bird flu can infect humans if the bird secretions get into a person's eyes, nose, and mouth or are inhaled. This year, 2025, the United States has identified 68 cases of human infection resulting, in 1 death. Frequent hand washing is essential if exposed to birds, and avoiding hand-to-eye contact and wearing gloves, masks and goggles may also be protective. Avoid known sick birds and wash hands when around all birds. Please stay informed of these evolving risks in your area.

Good Health to All,
Health Letter Editor