



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
**Greene County**



## **Greene County Public Health**

*Melissa Howell MS, MBA, MPH, RN, RS, Health Commissioner*  
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# **Press Release**

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Respiratory Illnesses On The Rise & How To Tell The Difference**

**GREENE COUNTY, OH**—There is much discussion occurring in the world of public health right now about the potential for high cases this season of flu, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), and COVID-19. In fact, last week, Greene County Public Health began to see a slight uptick in hospitalized flu cases in older adults. Most cases are likely to be mild, but together, they could sicken millions of Americans and swamp hospitals. Local public health officials want to remind the public that it is more important than ever to protect against these respiratory illnesses, that can sometimes be severe, leading to hospitalization and death. But how do you tell the difference between them?

### **Symptoms: RSV**

RSV is a virus nearly all children get by age 2. In addition to a cough, runny nose and fever, a unique symptom of RSV is wheezing. A wheeze sounds like a whistle or rattle when your child breathes.

Most children recover from RSV on their own, but sometimes, it can lead to severe illnesses such as:

- Bronchiolitis, swelling of the small airways in your child's lungs.
- Pneumonia, an infection of your child's lungs.

RSV can infect people of any age but is most serious for young children and older adults. Hospitals admit nearly 60,000 children under age 5 for RSV every year.

### **Symptoms: Flu**

A distinctive sign of the flu is a very high fever. Along with other respiratory symptoms, the flu often causes high fevers of 103- or 104-degrees Fahrenheit (39.44 or 40 degrees Celsius). People usually feel miserable, more so than with other viruses. This can include nausea and vomiting as well, which, though not unique to the flu, is also often worse than with other viruses.

Adults over the age of 65, those with chronic medical conditions, pregnant people, and children under age 5, and especially under age 2, are at higher risk of complications from the flu. These include:

- Dehydration.
- Inflammation of their heart, brain, or muscle tissues.
- Pneumonia.

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- Sinus and ear infections.

Each year, between 7,000 and 26,000 children develop symptoms serious enough to require hospitalization.

### Symptoms: COVID-19

The signs of COVID-19 are similar to flu and RSV, which can include high fever, coughing, and congestion. But unlike the other viruses, COVID-19 can have a serious effect on body systems outside the lungs. Flu can do this too, but the symptoms usually go away once the virus leaves your lungs. COVID can cause long-term effects, such as brain fog, fatigue, and shortness of breath, along with heart and kidney damage, to name a few.

Several symptoms you may think are unique to COVID-19 are common among respiratory viruses. For example:

- Loss of taste and smell: Many viruses, including those that cause the common cold and flu, can affect your sense of taste and smell.
- Vomiting and diarrhea: Up to 30% of children with respiratory viruses have gastrointestinal symptoms.

### Prevention of Respiratory Illnesses

We have several tools in our “healthcare toolbox” that we can pull out and use to prevent these illnesses.

Everyday precautions to stop the spread of germs include the following:

- Get vaccinated for both flu and COVID-19. Vaccines are widely available through local pharmacies, your local public health department, primary care physicians, and local health clinics. While they may not prevent infection, they still offer the best protection against severe illness and death. Everyone, particularly those at high risk, such as older adults, immunocompromised people, and pregnant women, should get vaccinated as soon as possible.
  - Visit <https://gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov> to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine appointment near you.
  - Ask your primary care physician or local pharmacist about getting the flu vaccine
- Stay home if you’re sick and away from others.
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or other necessities (the fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medicine like Tylenol or Advil).
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. After using a tissue, throw it in the trash and wash your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like flu.

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For more information, please call 937-374-5600 or visit [www.gcph.info](http://www.gcph.info).

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