

JB Pritzker, Governor

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Summary and Action Items

Illinois has seen a steady increase in emergency department visits and hospitalizations due to respiratory infections (especially RSV) in those under 18. The elevated visits and hospitalizations are creating a health system crisis in pediatric critical care access with an **acute shortage** in pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) beds, directly impacting the health system capacity heading into the fall/winter. This advisory is to alert providers to the situation and provide tools to help mitigate the surge in respiratory illnesses.

Situational Awareness

Currently in Illinois, there are 289 PICU beds; with more than 50% of the beds in the City of Chicago. As of October 18, 2022, there were only 6% open PICU beds remaining across the state. As we head into flu season and await a potential COVID-19 surge, this low number of PICU beds makes prevention of non-vaccine preventable infections, like RSV and other respiratory diseases, even more important. When [PICU bed capacity is compromised, the hospital system's ability to fully address acute care and serious illness may also become compromised, leading to severe health outcomes, including death](#). Protecting this critical infrastructure is vital for children across Illinois.

Community Recommendations

Providers and health care facilities are advised to encourage the following community actions and messages to decrease the overall burden of respiratory illness and, consequently, the need for hospitalization of children.

- a) Mask indoors in crowded areas, especially at large gatherings during the upcoming holiday season, to prevent acquiring any infection, such as RSV, flu, or COVID-19.
- b) Wear a mask if you develop any symptoms, such as a runny nose, cough, or fever.
- c) Cover your cough and sneezes and stay home until you are feeling better or fever free for at least 24 hours without needing fever reducing medications.
- d) During holiday parties or communal dining, make sure to frequently wash one's hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer and avoid touching utensils that are frequently handled by others.
- e) Whenever possible, maximize indoor [ventilation](#) and air circulation.
- f) Get vaccinated for the flu and get up to date on the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.
- g) If your child 6 months or older qualifies for Synagis for RSV prevention, [talk to your provider at the earliest](#).

Health Care Facility Surge Mitigation Strategies

Additionally, providers and health care facilities are advised to consider the following mitigation measures to ease the strain on PICU bed capacity:

- Enhance communications with other hospitals that have pediatric units.

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- Expedite discharges when applicable, including considering the feasibility of home health care and home hospital care.
- Utilize contractual staffing.
- Cross-train other non-pediatric staff who may be able to provide patient care in pediatric areas.
- Ensure timely and accurate reporting of available staffed pediatric and PICU beds.
- Increase the frequency of pediatric bed availability reporting in EmResource for a region or regions.
- Share information/education on wearing face masks, enhancing hand hygiene and physical distancing, particularly for those children with chronic medical conditions/weakened immune conditions.
- Utilize the IDPH RSV fact [sheet](#) for sharing education and [information about RSV](#).

What is IDPH doing?

IDPH is working with its sister agencies and other stakeholders to help address this situation and continues to refine its process for monitoring the PICU bed use across the state. IDPH is also developing resources for health care facilities to easily contact hospitals with pediatric beds in Illinois and surrounding states to assist in the transfer process to an available bed.

Target Audience

Local health departments, medical providers, pediatric providers, health care administrators, pharmacists, hospitals, health care facilities, infectious disease physicians, hospital emergency departments, infection control preventionists, and health care providers.

Resources:

[CDC – Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection \(RSV\) For Healthcare Providers](#)

[IDPH Webportal – Respiratory Syncytial Virus \(RSV\)](#)

[The Association Between Hospital Capacity Strain and Inpatient Outcomes in Highly Developed Countries: A Systematic Review - Journal of Internal Medicine, 2017 Jun; 32\(6\); 686-696](#)

[CDC - Impact of Hospital Strain on Excess Deaths During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, July 2020–July 2021](#)

[HFS Provider Notice Issued 9/30/2022 – Prior Approval Request for Synagis Dosing](#)

Date Issued

October 20, 2022