

# IT'S RESPIRATORY VIRUS SEASON

## Is Your Facility Prepared?

While current rates of RSV and COVID are low in New York State, influenza has been roaring ahead faster and more aggressively than last flu season. Rates of all these respiratory viruses are expected to rise after holiday gatherings and travel, leading to potentially greater patient surges.

According to [NYS Department of Health surveillance](#), both reported rates of influenza infection and hospitalization for influenza-like illness are increasing significantly each week. The CDC has a [wastewater surveillance system](#) that tracks influenza, COVID and RSV levels by state. These sites are updated on a weekly basis.

In addition seasonal influenza and COVID booster vaccination rates are lower this year, which may result in higher infection rates and more acute disease.

**Cutting beds, "just in time" management policies and minimal staffing levels leave healthcare facilities ill equipped for patient surges**

Healthcare facility management policies and resource management leave little wiggle room for patient surges. Preplanning and nurse advocacy are key to making sure patients get the care they need and nurses are not overwhelmed and overworked.

Key flu surge preparations should include:

- Adequate staffing
- Non-punitive sick leave policies
- Fast triage and separation of infectious patients from non-infectious patients and visitors
- Adequate bed capacity
- Visitor limitations
- Airborne infectious disease controls including improved ventilation
- Adequate supplies of PPE, medical equipment and medication

For a more detailed checklist, see the next page.

# Is Your Facility Prepared for Flu Surge?

Has the facility expanded ED triage capability, including fast-track triage at the ED entrance?

YES  NO

Has the facility set up alternative sites from the ED, both on and off campus, to conduct medical screening exams for influenza-like illness (ILI) if the ED becomes overcrowded?

YES  NO

Has the facility created separate ED waiting and treatment areas for patients with ILI to prevent the transmission of influenza to non-infected patients and visitors?

YES  NO

Has the facility prepared for adequate staffing at a time when healthcare staff may be absent due to illness and patient census is surging? Is a system in place to immediately identify and address staffing shortages?

YES  NO

Is environmental services adequately staffed to maintain a clean environment?

YES  NO

Has the facility implemented a non-punitive sick leave policy to ensure that infectious healthcare staff do not come to work which could result in flu transmission to colleagues and patients?

YES  NO

Has staffing in the ED, pediatrics and the ICU been increased to handle additional patients?

YES  NO

Has the facility expanded its supply of PPE including N95s, gowns, gloves and face shields/goggles? Is the facility capable of providing immediate respirator fit testing as needed? Are enough surgical/procedure masks available for patients and visitors?

YES  NO

Has the facility expanded its supply of ventilators, portable HEPA filters, testing kits, hand hygiene supplies, cardiac monitors, antiviral medication, etc.?

YES  NO

Is the facility increasing air filtration through the use of portable HEPA filter equipment and increased outside and and/or filtered air through the HVAC system?

YES  NO

Is there adequate bed capacity to keep infectious patients out of hallways in the ED and on inpatient units?

YES  NO

Is the facility prepared to activate the Hospital Incident Command System (HICS) if needed? Have staff been pre-assigned to HICS roles?

YES  NO

Have visitor limitations been put in place, including limits to visiting hours, limits to the number of visitors allowed at a time, limitations on bringing young children into the hospital and requiring visitor masking?

YES  NO

Does the facility have a system in place to identify and address nosocomial flu infection?

YES  NO

**NYSNA's Occupational Health and Safety Representatives are available to answer questions and provide on-site assistance. They can be reached at [healthandsafety@nysna.org](mailto:healthandsafety@nysna.org)**

