



ALERT FOR HOSPITAL HEALTHCARE WORKERS

COVID-19 rising; prepare for influenza and RSV

KEY POINTS

- **COVID-19** cases, hospitalisations and wastewater indicators are increasing in Western Australia (WA).
- **Influenza** and **RSV** notifications remain at inter-seasonal levels but are expected to increase soon.
- Healthcare workers are reminded to:
 - **stay home if unwell**
 - follow standard and transmission-based precautions, including facility advice about **mask-wearing**
 - encourage eligible patients to receive COVID-19, seasonal influenza and RSV **immunisations**
 - **test** patients who have symptoms of an acute respiratory infection
 - consider **antiviral medications** for eligible patients with [COVID-19](#) and [influenza](#).

Infection prevention and control

- Healthcare workers are reminded to:
 1. stay home if unwell or if they test positive for COVID-19, influenza or RSV
 2. follow standard and transmission-based precautions including [hand hygiene](#), respiratory hygiene (cough etiquette), appropriate and correct use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and cleaning and disinfection of shared equipment
 3. wear a fit tested particulate filter respirator (P2 or N95) or surgical mask and protective eyewear if providing care to patients who are symptomatic or test positive for an acute respiratory infection, as per local facility guidelines.
- Healthcare facilities may reinstate routine mask-wearing: as part of their winter respiratory virus strategy, during specific situations (e.g. ward-based respiratory virus outbreak), in high-risk areas, or on advice from facility infection prevention and control staff, infectious disease physicians and/or clinical microbiologists.
- See [COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control in WA Healthcare Facilities](#) for further information.

Testing

- Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing is the gold standard for confirming SARS-CoV-2, influenza and RSV infection. This includes rapid or point-of-care PCR tests (e.g. GeneXpert and BioFire).
- Rapid antigen tests (RATs) are a useful alternative to PCR tests in hospitals for releasing cases from isolation, staff return-to-work, and testing asymptomatic contacts.
- With the increased availability of combination RATs for COVID-19, influenza and RSV, PCR testing should be considered to ensure adequate respiratory virus surveillance in higher risk settings.
- For hospital inpatients and planned admissions with suspected COVID-19, influenza or RSV, an initial RAT may be useful for immediate management, but PCR testing should be performed to confirm the virus or exclude dual viruses.
- PCR testing is advised if RSV is suspected in paediatric patients in emergency departments and inpatient wards in the context of the new WA RSV paediatric immunisation (nirsevimab) rollout.
- In adults, RATs for RSV are less sensitive than PCR due to lower levels of virus and are more likely to give false negative results.

Notification of cases

- Routine laboratory notifications of PCR-positive cases of COVID-19, influenza and RSV occur; clinicians can notify using the communicable disease [notification form](#).
- For public health advice, phone your local [Public Health Unit](#).

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