

Despite pleas from pediatric groups, Biden balks at declaring RSV a health emergency

November 18 2022, by Cara Murez



The Biden administration on Thursday offered assistance to

communities and hospitals dealing with a surge in cases of pediatric respiratory illnesses, but it did not declare a national public health emergency.

The Children's Hospital Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics had asked President Joe Biden and Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra for that designation in a [letter](#) that noted an "alarming surge of pediatric hospitalizations."

Seasonal flu and an early spike in cases of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) among babies and toddlers are to blame: About 78% of pediatric hospital beds are full throughout the United States.

Seven states have reached more than 90% of capacity in hospital beds for children, *NBC News* reported.

"These unprecedented levels of RSV happening with growing flu rates, ongoing high numbers of children in [mental health crisis](#) and serious workforce shortages are combining to stretch pediatric care capacity at the hospital and community level to the [breaking point](#)," the pediatric groups wrote. "This crisis requires more action and support."

But a Biden administration official said in a statement that "[public health emergencies](#) are determined based on nationwide data, science trends, and the insight of public health experts," and that the administration is "ready to provide assistance to communities who are in need of help on a case-by-case basis," *NBC News* reported.

The official encouraged people to avoid close contact with those who are ill, stay home when sick, cover coughs and sneezes, and get updated flu and COVID-19 vaccines.

"We're already seeing a rise in the flu and RSV and other respiratory

illnesses, especially among [young children](#)," Biden said last month at the White House, *NBC News* reported. "My administration is doing our part. We've made these updated vaccines easy to get and available for free at tens of thousands of convenient locations."

An emergency declaration would have allowed a more flexible response by pediatric practices and for FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) assistance, *NBC News* reported.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [RSV](#).

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