

Flu hangs on in US, fading in some areas and intensifying in others

February 9 2024, by Mike Stobbe



A sign for flu and covid vaccinations is displayed at a pharmacy store in Palatine, Ill., Wednesday, Sept. 13, 2023. The flu is hanging on in the U.S., intensifying in some areas of the country after weeks of apparent decline., according to data released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday, Feb. 9, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh, File

The flu virus is hanging on in the U.S., intensifying in some areas of the country after weeks of an apparent national decline.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data released Friday showed a continued national drop in flu hospitalizations, but other indicators were up—including the number of states with high or very high levels for respiratory illnesses.

"Nationally, we can say we've peaked, but on a regional level it varies," said the CDC's Alicia Budd. "A couple of regions haven't peaked yet."

Patient traffic has eased a bit in the Southeast and parts of the West Coast, but flu-like illnesses seem to be proliferating in the Midwest and have even rebounded a bit in some places. Last week, reports were at high levels in 23 states—up from 18 the week before, CDC officials said.

Flu generally peaks in the U.S. between December and February. National data suggests this season's peak came around late December, but a second surge is always possible. That's happened in other flu seasons, with the second peak often—but not always—lower than the first, Budd said.

So far, the season has been relatively typical, Budd said. According to CDC estimates, since the beginning of October, there have been at least 22 million illnesses, 250,000 hospitalizations, and 15,000 deaths from flu. The agency said 74 children have died of flu.

COVID-19 illnesses seem to have peaked at around the same time as flu. CDC [data](#) indicates coronavirus-caused hospitalizations haven't hit the same levels they did at the same point during the last three winters. COVID-19 is putting more people in the hospital than flu, CDC [data](#) shows.

The national trends have played out in Chapel Hill, said Dr. David Weber, an infectious diseases expert at the University of North Carolina.

Weber is also medical director of infection prevention at UNC Medical Center, where about a month ago more than 100 of the hospital's 1,000 beds were filled with people with COVID-19, flu or the respiratory virus RSV.

That's not as bad as some previous winters—at one point during the pandemic, 250 beds were filled with COVID-19 patients. But it was bad enough that the hospital had to declare a capacity emergency so that it could temporarily bring some additional beds into use, Weber said.

Now, about 35 beds are filled with patients suffering from one of those viruses, most of them COVID-19, he added.

"I think in general it's been a pretty typical year," he said, adding that what's normal has changed to include COVID-19, making everything a little busier than it was before the pandemic.

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