Respiratory Illness Season Preparedness Fireside Chat

October 2026
Co-hosted by: OARC

Ministry of Long-Term Care
Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health

Ontario

Land Acknowledgement

Together, let us now pause as we acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands that we are on today, from wherever we are virtually participating in today's meeting. Let us take a moment to acknowledge the importance of the land we each call home.

We do this to affirm our commitment and responsibility to improving relationships between nations, and to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous Peoples and their cultures.

We acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people who call this nation home.

Let us now join in a moment of reflection to acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past and to consider how each of us, in our own way, can move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

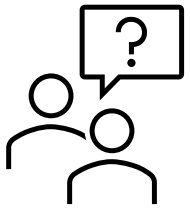
OARC Ontario Association of Residents' Councils

Webinar Housekeeping



Chat Box

The Chat feature is disabled during this session.



Question Box

Type questions in the Q&A box. We will answer as many as possible during the presentation.



Recording

A recorded version of this webinar will be available on OARC's website. www.ontarc.com



Evaluation

After the webinar, a pop-up screen asking you to complete a survey will appear. Your feedback and suggestions are appreciated.

OARC Ontario Association of Residents' Councils

Agenda

Topic	Time	Lead Speakers
2026-27 Respiratory Season Overview	15 min	• Dr. Daniel Warshafsky
2026-27 Respiratory Season Immunization Program Overview	15 min	• Dr. Daniel Warshafsky
Q&A	30 min	All: Moderated by OARC

2026-27 Respiratory Season Overview

Ontario

Respiratory Season Overview

- As we head into the fall and winter months, respiratory viruses like influenza, RSV, and COVID-19 begin to circulate more actively throughout the community.
    - In Ontario, respiratory viruses are typically most active between November and April, with some variation between seasons and viruses.
- These viruses spread easily from person to person through activities like coughing, sneezing, talking and physical contact.
    - A person can spread a virus to others even before they notice any symptoms.

Common symptoms seen with respiratory virus infections

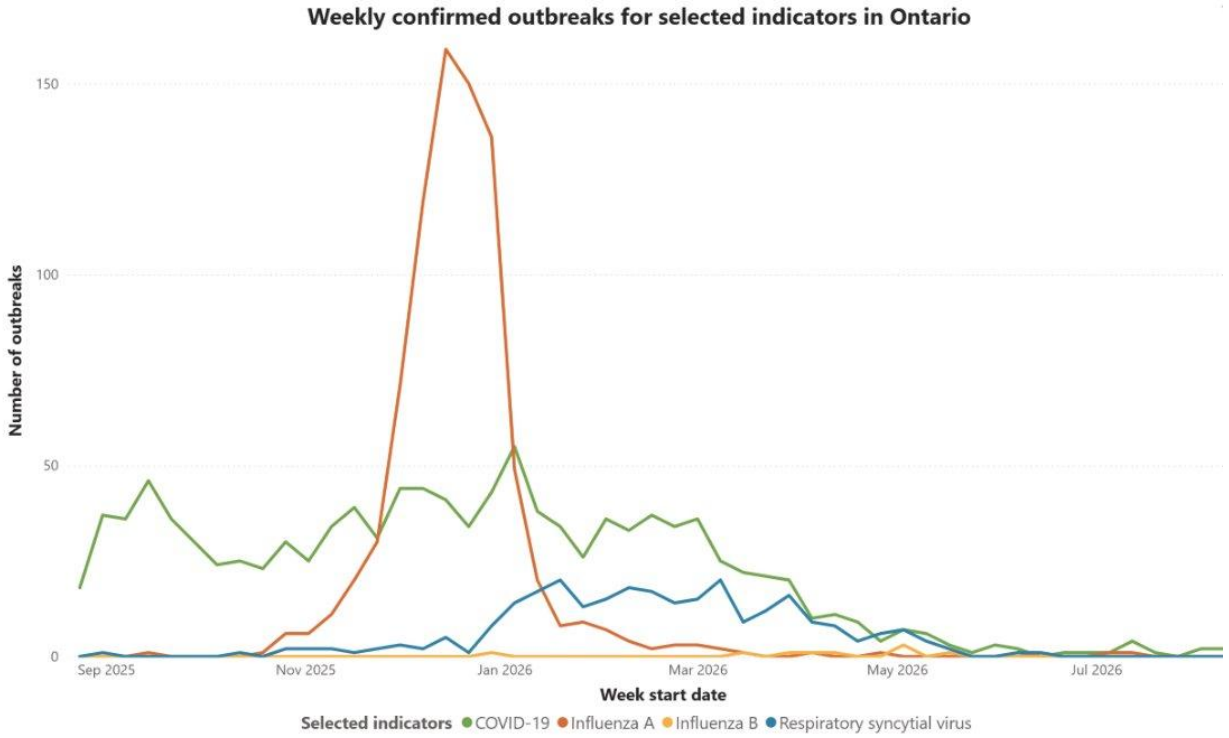
Symptoms of respiratory infections range from mild to severe, and may include one or more of the following:

- Fever or chills
- Coughing and/or sneezing
- Shortness of breath
- Runny nose or nasal congestion
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches or joint pain
- Delirium/confusion
- *Vomiting and diarrhea (more so in younger children)*

Source: Ministry of Health - Protection from respiratory illnesses

What To Expect for the 2026/27 Respiratory Season

- The 2025-26 respiratory season was characterized by high levels of influenza activity and low levels of COVID-19.
- At this time, we expect this year's respiratory season to be similar to previous seasons in that we will likely see different respiratory viruses circulate in Ontario, including but not limited to COVID-19, influenza, and RSV.
- However, there is still a risk of atypical timing of peaks of activity and potential for increased impact on vulnerable populations.



Source: Ministry of Health – Seasonal Respiratory Pathogen Guide (August 2025);
Graph source: Government of Canada - Canadian respiratory virus surveillance report

Respiratory Virus Infection in Older Adults and Long-Term Care Homes

- Long-term care homes are vibrant and social environments where staff, caregivers, and other visitors come and go daily. As respiratory viruses become more widespread in the community, the risk of those viruses entering the home and impacting the residents also increases.
- While anyone can get sick, some groups of people have higher chances of developing severe illness and complications, including older adults and those with underlying medical conditions.
- These complications can include:
    - Worsening of chronic health conditions, such as underlying heart, lung, kidney, and neurological conditions
    - Heart complications, like arrhythmia and heart failure exacerbations
    - Pneumonia and respiratory failure
    - Hospitalizations
    - Death

Source: Public Health Agency of Canada - Respiratory infectious diseases: Reduce your risk; Public Health Agency of Canada - Flu (influenza): Prevention and risks

Staying Healthy and Safe During Respiratory Season

- Everyone has a role to play in keeping the LTC home and its community safe – good IPAC practices are for everyone.
- Residents and caregivers can protect themselves and others:
  - Staying up to date with their vaccines
  - Notifying staff if a resident is feeling unwell
  - Wearing a mask (if possible)
  - Covering your mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing
  - Washing your hands
  - Communicating with the home re: resident's goals and care needs
  - For caregivers – avoiding visits when sick, if possible
  - Following the directions of staff and public health officials in an outbreak



Source: Public Health Ontario - How To Protect Yourself and Others from Respiratory Viruses
Image source: Vecteezy.com

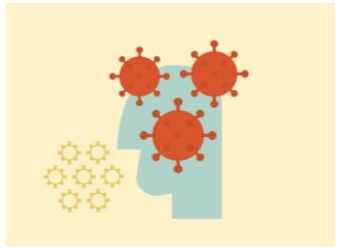
Outbreak Response and Management

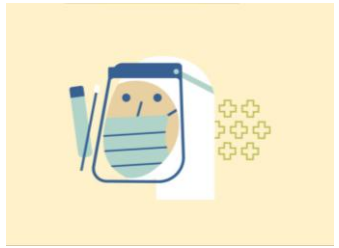
- A respiratory infection outbreak in a LTC home means that there are two or more residents who develop respiratory symptoms within a short time frame and we think the infection was spread among these ill residents.
    - Example: symptomatic residents share a room or participated in an activity together.
- During an outbreak, the home will take measures under the direction of public health officials in order to:
    - Prevent additional residents, staff, caregivers from getting sick;
    - Ensure that the residents continue to receive appropriate care; and
    - Identify and address factors that contributed to the outbreak.
- All homes are required to report suspected/confirmed outbreaks of respiratory illnesses to their local Public Health Unit and to the Ministry of Long-Term Care.

Source: Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) – Best Practices for the Prevention of Acute Respiratory Infection Transmission in All Health Care Settings

What to Expect When a Resident is Sick

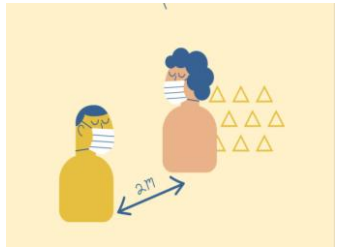
If you are feeling sick, please notify a home staff member as soon as you are concerned.

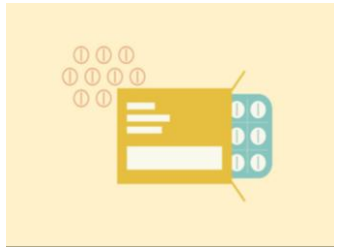




If you are feeling sick, a health care provider will obtain a sample from you for testing.

You should stay in your room and avoid communal activities while you're sick.





If the you or others test positive for COVID-19 or the flu, you may be offered medications to help you fight the virus.

If you are receiving care or sharing communal space with others, you are encouraged to wear a mask where possible.





Remember to practice respiratory etiquette by properly washing your hands, especially after coughing or sneezing.

Source: Ministry of Health - Recommendations for Outbreak Prevention and Control in Institutions and Congregate Living Settings (February 2025)
Image source: Vecteezy.com

Who's Who in a Long-Term Care Home Outbreak

Public Health

- Lead outbreak investigation and management which include directing:
  - Outbreak measures
  - Testing
  - Prophylaxis/vaccine
- Provide IPAC guidance and support
- Declare and end outbreaks

Long-Term Care Home

- Notify public health (and MLTC)
- Continue to provide care for residents
- Follow the directions of public health in an outbreak and implement outbreak protocols
- Maintain line lists and documentation of outbreak
- Communicate and provide updates to staff, residents, families

Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)

- Provide oversight and sector-specific guidance to long-term care homes in Ontario
- Support compliance
- Coordinate with public health and homes as needed

IPAC Hubs

- Offer infection prevention and control expertise to homes
- Support homes with training and capacity based on IPAC best practices
- Support assessments and audits of IPAC programs/practices
- Support homes with outbreak measures as needed

Source: Ministry of Health - Recommendations for Outbreak Prevention and Control in Institutions and Congregate Living Settings (February 2025)

2026/27 Respiratory Season Immunization Program Overview

Ontario

Immunizations for the 2026/27 Respiratory Season

- Immunizations are safe, effective, and the best way to remain protected against the most severe outcomes of infection, including hospitalization and death.
- To protect against serious illness throughout the upcoming respiratory illness season, it is recommended that all LTCH residents and staff get their **COVID-19** and **flu shots** as soon as they are available.
- It is also recommended that all eligible LTCH residents receive their **RSV vaccine** if they did not receive it in previous years.
- Don’t forget about routine immunizations, like the measles and the pneumococcal vaccine.



[2024 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health - Protecting Tomorrow: The Future of Immunization in Ontario]

2026/27 COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccines

- **All long-term care home residents, staff, and care providers (including caregivers) are strongly recommended to receive their updated COVID-19 and annual influenza vaccines when they are available for this respiratory season.**
- Note for COVID-19 vaccines – updated this season to provide optimum protection against circulating strains
  - You can receive your COVID-19 vaccine if it has been at least 3 months since your last COVID-19 vaccine OR your last test- confirmed COVID-19 infection
  - **Long-term care home residents are also strongly recommended to receive another dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in the spring**



Ontario

High-Risk Older Adults RSV Immunization Program

- First introduced during the 2023/24 respiratory season.
    - Expanded eligibility this year to include adults 60-74 years who are:
        - Recipients of a hematopoietic stem cell transplant within the past two years or with ongoing immunosuppression;
        - Individuals on home oxygen or requiring chronic oxygen therapy, regardless of residence.
- The RSV vaccine in older adults has been demonstrated to be safe and effective.
    - It has been demonstrated to reduce RSV-infection related hospitalization rates in older adults by up to 70-80%.
- Products: Arexvy (GSK) and Abrysvo (Pfizer) - both products were used in previous years.
- Long-term care home residents remain eligible to receive a publicly funded dose of the RSV vaccine if they have not received one previously.
- **If an individual previously received a dose of RSV vaccine, they do not need to receive another dose** – a single dose offers multi-year protection, and the vaccine may be given at any time during the year.

Vaccine Co-Administration

- **Respiratory season vaccines can be given at the same time (co-administered) – it is safe, convenient, and recommended.**
- RSV vaccine can also be co-administered with both seasonal and non-seasonal vaccines.
    - Concurrent administration of the RSV vaccine to adults 60 years of age and older with other recommended vaccines are in alignment with basic vaccine principles.
- **We encourage residents to receive COVID-19 and the flu vaccines at the same time whenever possible.**

Key Takeaways

- Respiratory infections (like the common cold, the flu, or COVID-19) are more common in fall/winter and spread easily between people, even when they don't look like they're sick.
- We all can take actions to protect ourselves and help keep one another safe and healthy this respiratory season.
- Outbreaks can happen at any time, and when they do, make sure to follow the directions of the home and public health to prevent others from getting sick.
- Staying up to date with your immunizations is the safest, easiest, and most effective way to stay healthy and reduce your chances of needing to go to the hospital this respiratory season.
    - **LTC residents and caregivers are strongly recommended to receive a dose of COVID-19 and flu vaccines as soon as they become available**.
    - LTC residents should receive a dose of the RSV vaccine if they have not received one before, this can be given at anytime during the year.
    - LTC residents are strongly recommended to receive a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in the spring when they become available.