



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **IDPH Urges Public to Protect Loved Ones from COVID-19, Other Respiratory Viruses & Food-borne Illnesses During Thanksgiving Holiday**

*Illinoisans urged to Get Fully Vaccinated for COVID-19 & Flu; Stay Home if you are Sick; Illinois Reports 14,388 New COVID-19 Cases in Last Week*

**CHICAGO** – With many families planning to gather for Thanksgiving, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is urging Illinoisans to celebrate the holiday safely by take precautions to protect vulnerable family members from COVID-19 and the flu – and to pay close attention to food safety. In addition to being fully vaccinated and boosted for COVID-19 and the flu, IDPH encourages the public to get tested before attending holiday gatherings, especially if you’ll be visiting someone at high risk for severe COVID-19; to stay home if you are sick; and practice good hand hygiene. In addition, holiday hosts are urged to ensure gatherings are well-ventilated and to follow food safety guidelines in handling hot and cold foods to prevent food-borne illnesses.

These safety reminders come as the CDC reported 21 Illinois counties were at an elevated [Community Level for COVID-19](#) as of November 18. IDPH is reporting 14,388 new confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 in Illinois, and 59 deaths since November 16.

“We, at IDPH, wish all Illinois residents a very happy and healthy Thanksgiving. As we spend time with our families, friends, and loved ones for great food and fun, I want to remind Illinoisans that there are some safeguards we can all rely on to stay healthy,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “When it comes to the Thanksgiving meal, it is important to follow basic food safety tips, including properly thawing frozen turkeys and making sure your turkey and stuffing are thoroughly cooked to a safe temperature of 165° Fahrenheit. And as respiratory illnesses such as RSV, the flu, and COVID-19 are continuing to lead to illnesses and hospitalizations, there are a number of strategies that will keep us all healthy and safe. These include COVID-19 testing, especially if visiting someone at risk for severe disease; enhanced ventilation; good hand hygiene; staying home if sick; and getting up to date with both the COVID-19 bivalent booster and the flu shot. I hope all Illinoisans have a great holiday.”

The CDC offers valuable advice on [how to safely cook a holiday turkey](#). The first step is to safely thaw the bird. When turkey begins to thaw, any bacteria that may have been present before freezing can begin to grow again. A turkey must thaw at a safe temperature to prevent harmful

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germs from growing rapidly. Thaw turkey in the refrigerator, in a sink of cold water (change water every 30 minutes), or in the microwave. Never thaw your turkey by leaving it out on the counter.

The four main steps for food safety are:

- **Clean** – Wash your hands with soap and water before, during, and after preparing your food, especially before and after handling turkey.
- **Separate** – Raw turkey and its juice can contaminate anything they touch. Be sure to handle your turkey correctly to prevent harmful germs from spreading to other food or your family and friends. Use one cutting board for raw turkey and a separate cutting board for produce, bread, and other foods that won't be cooked. Wash cutting boards, utensils, dishes, and countertops with hot soapy water after preparing raw turkey and before you prepare the next item.
- **Cook** – Use a food thermometer to check if the turkey and stuffing has reached a safe internal temperature of 165° F. Take the temperature in three places – the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the thigh, and the innermost part of the wing. For stuffing, make sure the stuffing's center reaches 165°F.
- **Chill** – Do not leave foods at room temperature more than two hours. After you are done eating, divide the remaining food into small containers and either refrigerate or freeze. Leftovers are safe in the refrigerator for up to four days. Reheat all leftovers to at least 165°F before serving or eating.

IDPH is helping Illinoisans prepare for a potential fall and winter surge of COVID-19 cases by offering 1 million free COVID-19 rapid antigen tests to residents in economically disadvantaged zip codes through a partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation's public charity, RF Catalytic Capital and its Project ACT (Access COVID Tests) program.

Through Project ACT, IDPH will be distributing one million at-home antigen tests to 200,000 Illinois families in zip codes outside the City of Chicago that are rated high on a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI). Households can find out if they are in an eligible zip code and request one package of five tests on a first-come-first-serve basis at the [Project ACT website](#). The tests will be delivered to the home address.

Free or low cost COVID-19 testing locations are also available throughout the state, including in Chicago, and can be found on the IDPH website's [testing locator page](#).

The CDC authorized two new bivalent booster vaccines on September 1 that include an mRNA component of the original strain to provide an immune response that is broadly protective against COVID-19 and an added mRNA component in common between the omicron variant BA.4 and BA.5 lineages to provide better protection against COVID-19 caused by the omicron variant.

Initially, the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine, Bivalent, was authorized for use as a single booster dose in individuals 18 years of age and older and the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, Bivalent, was authorized for use as a single booster dose in individuals 12 years of age and older. On October 12, the CDC authorized the updated COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech for



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children ages 5 through 11 years, and from Moderna for children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years.

The updated boosters are available at pharmacies, hospitals, and other healthcare providers. The best way to locate a vaccine provider near you is to visit [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov) and search for bivalent booster availability.

Currently, IDPH is reporting a total of 3,858,155 cases, including 35,414 deaths, in 102 counties in Illinois since the beginning of the pandemic.

As of last night, 1,112 individuals in Illinois were reported to be in the hospital with COVID-19. Of those, 112 patients were in the ICU and 41 patients with COVID-19 were on ventilators. The preliminary seven-day statewide case rate is 113 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 Illinoisans.

In counties at the **Medium Community Level**, persons who are elderly or immunocompromised (at risk of severe outcomes) are advised to wear a mask in indoor public places. They should also get up to date on COVID-19 vaccines or get their bivalent booster, if eligible.

IDPH has been supporting pharmacies and healthcare providers in efforts to increase their inventories of the various FDA-authorized treatments. There are [over 1,200 treatment locations](#) in Illinois - including all the major retail pharmacies. More than 96.7% of the state's population is within a 10-mile radius of one of these locations.

A total of 25,244,887 vaccines have been administered in Illinois. The seven-day rolling average of vaccines administered daily is 21,778 doses, including the bivalent booster and first doses. Since November 11, 152,443 vaccine doses were reported administered in Illinois. More than 1.7 million people in Illinois have received the new bivalent booster dose since it was authorized. Of Illinois' total population, more than 78% have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, more than 70% have completed their primary series of COVID-19 vaccines, and of the eligible population, more than 14% have received the bivalent booster dose, according to [data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Data indicates that the risk of hospitalization and severe outcomes from COVID-19 is much higher for unvaccinated people than for those who are up to date on their vaccinations. All data are provisional and are subject to change. Additional information and COVID-19 data can be found at <https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19.html>.

Vaccination is the key to ending this pandemic. To find a COVID-19 vaccination location near you, go to [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov). The federal government has established a new website that

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provides an all-purpose toolkit with information on how to obtain masks, treatment, vaccines and testing resources for all areas of the country at: <https://www.covid.gov/>.

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