



ALERT FOR CLINICIANS

Increase in COVID-19; prepare for influenza and RSV

KEY POINTS

- **COVID-19** cases, hospitalisations and wastewater indicators are increasing in WA. Omicron sub-variant NB.1.8.1 now predominates in clinical and wastewater samples. NB.1.8.1 has been linked to surges in COVID-19 activity in other countries, although current data do not indicate that it leads to more severe illness than other circulating variants.
- **Influenza** has been circulating above the seasonal threshold for most of the year, with evidence of an increase in activity over recent weeks.
- **RSV** notifications remain at interseasonal levels but are expected to increase soon.
- Healthcare workers are reminded to:
 - **vaccinate** eligible patients and aged care residents against COVID-19, influenza and RSV
 - **test** patients and aged care residents who have symptoms of an acute respiratory infection
 - consider **antiviral medications** for eligible patients and residents with COVID-19 or influenza.

Infection prevention and control

- Healthcare workers are reminded to:
 - stay home if unwell or if they test positive for COVID-19, influenza or RSV
 - 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.
- As per the [COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control in WA Healthcare Facilities](#) guidelines, healthcare and residential care facilities may implement routine mask-wearing: as part of their winter respiratory virus strategy, during specific situations (e.g. respiratory virus outbreak), in high-risk areas, or on advice from infection prevention and control staff.

Immunisation and antiviral medications

- Encourage eligible patients and aged care residents to receive COVID-19, seasonal influenza and RSV immunisations to protect against severe disease and complications:
 - free [COVID-19 vaccines](#) continue to be available for eligible Western Australians
 - free [influenza vaccines](#) are currently available for all Western Australians aged 6 months and older
 - free [RSV immunisation](#) is currently available for eligible infants and pregnant women; a [RSV vaccine](#) is also recommended for older adults and is available via private purchase.
- Consider antivirals for eligible patients or aged care residents with COVID-19 or influenza.

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).
- PCR testing is advised for people at high-risk of severe disease and in higher risk settings.
- Rapid antigen tests (RATs) are a useful alternative to PCR testing in the community setting, where availability of PCR testing is limited, for releasing cases from isolation, and staff return-to-work.
- For hospital patients and planned admissions with suspected COVID-19, influenza or RSV, an initial RAT may be useful for immediate management, but confirmatory PCR testing should be performed.
- RATs are less sensitive than PCR for respiratory viruses, especially in adults and for RSV, and may give false negative results.

Dr Jelena Maticевич

A/DIRECTOR, COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL DIRECTORATE

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