OSF HealthCare issues urgent respiratory health alert amid rising patient numbers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Matt Sheehan | Media Relations Coordinator 314.402.8884

(Peoria, IL | December 7, 2023) – OSF HealthCare hospitals and clinics across the state are seeing a significant uptick in patients to begin December. The heavy increase in patients can lead to elevated exposure of germs and viruses, plus longer wait times.

As many viruses are circulating around our communities, it is paramount to monitor your symptoms and know when the right time is to seek medical care in person. Sarah Overton, the Chief Nursing Officer for OSF Medical Group, Home Care and Employee Health, stresses the importance of virtual care when your symptoms are mild.

"That way we're not exposing you to anyone in the public and you're not exposing the health care worker to illness," Overton says. "Unfortunately, we are seeing an increase in health care worker illness where our nurses and doctors have to stay home because they are being exposed to illness."

Hospitals across the OSF Ministry have been seeing a spike in COVID-19 patients. If you suspect you have COVID-19 but your symptoms are mild, take an at-home COVID-19 test. The federal government has another stockpile of at-home tests that are free to order on COVID.gov. Every household can receive four free rapid tests. Dr. Brian Curtis, Vice President of Clinical Specialty Services with OSF HealthCare, says taking tests at home will help free up space at medical facilities.

"Coming in just to get tested takes up spots for the people that are really sick or are high-risk," Dr. Curtis says.

"The Emergency Room is reserved for those true emergencies," Overton adds. "We have patients that have heart attacks and lung issues with their COPD. Additional patients overflowing the Emergency Room takes away precious time from assessing those patients who shouldn't be exposed to those viruses while being in our waiting rooms."

But COVID-19 isn't the only virus making the rounds in our communities right now. Influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and others are being seen often as well. So how can we stop the spread of viruses?

- Stay home when you aren't feeling well.
- Wash your hands and use hand sanitizer regularly.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Wipe down high-touch surfaces with disinfectant wipes.
- Don't share glasses or silverware with others.
- Receive the flu shot.

For treating mild symptoms at home, Dr. Curtis offers some guidance for using over-the-counter options.

"You can take Tylenol or Motrin for fevers and aches. Make sure to drink plenty of fluids and get plenty of rest," Dr. Curtis says.

Overton says to make sure you read the labels on any over-the-counter medication you buy. If you have any questions, you can ask a retail pharmacist, or send a message through MyChart to your OSF care team.

When is the right time to be seen?

"If you have a super deep cough that's hanging on for quite a while or have a fever that lasts for several days," Overton says. "Or if you have high-risk factors and may benefit from some of our medications for COVID, like Paxlovid, which are readily available in our retail pharmacy locations. We also have COVID-19 boosters able to be administered in our primary care offices."

"There is a medication for influenza, but if you have a mild case, you'll have more side effects from the medication than you are having from influenza itself. As far as RSV goes, there's really no treatment for it except for supportive care."

If you are sick and plan to visit a medical facility, please cover your face with a mask to decrease exposure to the health care workers.

Below you will find data about patient volumes in both the Peoria and Bloomington markets. *The 7-day period covers November 28-December 4, and the 30-day period is for November 5-December 4.*

Peoria Primary Care visits:
7-day period: 8,302 (1.6% increase from same 7-day period last year)
30-day period: 32,639 (4% increase from same 30-day period last year)

Peoria OnCall Urgent Care visits:
7-day period: 2,643
30-day period: 10,672 (13% increase from month before, 8.1% increase from same 30-day period last year)

Peoria PromptCare visits:
7-day period: 1,743
30-day period: 7,190 (14.3% increase from month prior)

OSF Saint Francis Medical Center Emergency Department - Peoria
7-day period: 1,625 (11.1% increase from week prior)
30-day period: 6,729

OSF St. Joseph Medical Center - Bloomington

Bloomington Primary Care visits:
7-day period: 2,897 (41.5% increase from week before)
30-day period: 11,608

Bloomington OnCall Urgent care visits:
7-day period: 848 (16.8% increase from week before)
30-day period: 3,508 (10.3% increase from month prior)

Bloomington PromptCare
7-day: 1,517
30-day: 6,176 (16.2% increase from month prior)

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