

A return to school comes with a return to activities.

But no matter if it's fall sports, extracurricular activities, or just hanging out with friends, there comes the increase spread of viruses, according to Doug Kasper, MD, an infectious disease specialist with OSF HealthCare.

"Not only are children, but the family unit as a whole is starting to do much more. They're going to be exposed to each other much more than they have been over the next few months," Dr. Kasper says.

The three main viruses remain the same as the past few years: Influenza (flu), COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). But others will arise as well, including adenovirus, rhinovirus/enterovirus (common cold) and more.

When viruses tend to peak

"Influenza in Central Illinois starts to appear around November, and peaks in January," Dr. Kasper says. "RSV, particularly in young children, starts to show up in September or October. COVID-19 has been a bit more seasonal each year, but we start to predict peaks in October. What you'll notice is that all of those will start to overlap."

How vaccinations play a role

As millions of kids are returning to school, Dr. Kasper says it's time to start scheduling checkups with their pediatrician and discussing back-to-school vaccinations.

"Vaccination now has more of an effect of protecting the individual so they can remain in their activities, school or job as long as possible," Dr. Kasper says. "We know in most situations there is more than one person in the household and more than one child at home. It's also helping decrease spread within the family unit when these things are brought home."

The flu vaccine, Dr. Kasper says, is recommended for anyone 6 months or older. Whereas the RSV vaccine is only available to certain people.

"RSV is most severe in our younger populations, ages 2 or younger, or in those 60 and older. While vaccination is only offered in select age groups, including pregnant women, there is still benefit to the family unit for the family to make sure those who can be vaccinated against RSV do get those at the appropriate time," Dr. Kasper says.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have come and gone, but the recommendation for yearly vaccination is starting to resemble the same strategy as the flu vaccine.

"COVID-19 guidance will be a little different," Dr. Kasper adds. "We're expecting an updated vaccine that will come out in the fall, probably October. We'll have unique recommendations for different age groups or those with medical conditions. But I'd expect the recommendation of one additional COVID-19 vaccine or booster for the fall into winter season."

Respiratory virus symptoms

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists a dozen symptoms you may potentially experience if you become sick with one of the abovementioned viruses.

- Fever

- Chills
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- New loss of taste or smell
- Headache, muscle or body aches
- Diarrhea
- Weakness

If you have trouble breathing or chest pain, seek emergency medical care immediately.

The [CDC's current recommendation](#) is to stay home and away from others until at least 24 hours after you are fever-free, and your symptoms are improving. Remember to wash your hands and [improve airflow](#) by opening windows and bringing in fresh outside air, purifying indoor air or spending time outdoors. Make sure to routinely change your central heating, ventilation and air conditioning system filters every few months.