



Health Update:

Seasonal Influenza and Avian Influenza (H5N1)

December 17, 2025

Situational updates

Seasonal influenza

Seasonal influenza activity is currently increasing, and influenza A (H3N2) is the most frequently reported strain nationally. Historically, this strain has led to more severe disease in older adults. A new H3N2 virus (subclade K) was identified by CDC in August 2025 and is antigenically drifted compared with the 2025–26 influenza A (H3N2) vaccine virus. U.S. vaccine effectiveness estimates are not available yet. However, [early estimates of vaccine effectiveness](#) in England against influenza-associated hospitalization remained within expected ranges of 30–40% for adults and 70–75% in children. Importantly, influenza vaccination continues to be the most effective primary tool to reduce overall burden of influenza disease and protect vulnerable populations at risk for severe illness.

Antiviral treatments are available and recommended for hospitalized patients and people who are at [high risk for severe illness](#). Receiving prompt treatment can reduce the risk of severe illness, hospitalization, or death.

Novel influenza (Avian Influenza A (H5N1))

There were [38 confirmed human cases](#) of avian influenza A (H5N1) in California between October 2024–January 2025. One [case](#) was detected in San Francisco in January 2025. While overall risk to the public remains low, differentiating between H5N1 and other types of influenza is essential for rapid identification, investigation, and treatment of novel flu. Routine influenza tests can confirm seasonal influenza A virus; however, additional testing is necessary to detect H5N1.

Actions requested of SF clinicians:

- [Recommend the 2025-26 influenza vaccine](#) to everyone 6 months and older who have not yet received a dose of the seasonal influenza vaccine.
- Remind patients to **wear a high-quality mask**, such as a KN95, in crowded indoor spaces and to **practice good hygiene**, using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Encourage patients to **stay home from school or work** until they have been fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication and other acute symptoms have resolved.
- **Test for seasonal influenza** in patients with respiratory illness.
 - Because of multiple viral and bacterial etiologies, diagnostic testing for influenza and other respiratory pathogens can guide clinical management, antimicrobial treatment, and infection prevention and control measures.

- Molecular testing is recommended; however, at-home influenza and COVID-19 tests can be used when available.
- **Arrange for subtyping** of patients with confirmed influenza A who are severely ill or hospitalized, prioritizing patients in ICUs, to monitor for novel influenza.
 - Work with laboratory partners to forward specimens positive for influenza A or unsubtypeable to the SFDPH Public Health Laboratory for further testing.
- **Treat with [influenza antiviral medication](#)** as soon as possible, especially when patients are hospitalized or have risk factors for severe disease. Do not wait for test results if empiric treatment is indicated. Although prompt treatment is best, any treatment can help reduce hospitalization and death.
- **Report** to the SFDPH Communicable Disease Program (628-217-6100):
 - **[Acute respiratory outbreaks](#) in congregate settings.**
 - **Any suspected avian influenza A cases** in patients with respiratory illness and/or conjunctivitis and recent exposure to sick or dead birds, recent consumption of raw dairy products, or other exposure risk factors for H5N1.
 - **Any pediatric influenza-associated deaths** in laboratory-confirmed cases.

Additional Resources:

Influenza

- CDPH: [Respiratory Viruses Hub](#)
- CDPH: [Influenza](#)
- CDPH: [Administer Immunizations in Preparation for Respiratory Virus Season \(Influenza, RSV, and COVID-19\)](#)
- CDPH: [Respiratory Virus Testing and Treatment for Healthcare Professionals](#)
- CDC: [Weekly US Influenza Surveillance Report: FluView](#)
- IDSA: [Clinical Practice Guidelines by the Infectious Diseases Society of America: 2018 Update on Diagnosis, Treatment, Chemoprophylaxis, and Institutional Outbreak Management of Seasonal Influenza](#)

Avian Influenza

- CDPH: [Subtyping of Influenza A in Hospitalized Patients](#)

Program Contact Information

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