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Health Director: COVID-19 Remains A Real Threat

An average of 35 Ohioans die of COVID each week;

Vaccination remains best defense

COLUMBUS – Ohio Department of Health Director Bruce Vanderhoff, MD, MBA, today cautioned Ohioans not to get complacent about COVID-19, as the disease continues to cause hospitalizations and deaths across the state.

Although case levels have declined from the peak of the pandemic, an average of 35 Ohioans still die of COVID-19 each week. For the year, the number of Ohioans who have died of COVID-19 is approaching 1,000 (958 as of October 23).

In addition, more than 6,000 Ohioans (6,266) have been hospitalized this year.

“COVID-19 has not gone away, and it remains a very real threat,” Dr. Vanderhoff said. “The virus continues to evolve and can cause severe illness or death, particularly among those who are unvaccinated. As a state, we need to take caution to not let our guard down.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months or older receive the updated 2024-25 COVID-19 shot to protect against severe COVID this fall and winter, along with their yearly flu shot.

Data continues to show that vaccination lowers the risk of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death. It also can reduce the risk of developing what is known as “long COVID,” a set of debilitating symptoms that can linger for months or even years after infection.

“With colder weather and the holiday season fast approaching, getting vaccinated is as important as ever, especially as we look forward to indoor gatherings with friends and loved ones,” Dr. Vanderhoff said. “This is particularly true for those ages 65 or older, as well as those who are immunocompromised or have certain chronic health conditions, as they are at greater risk.”

A new study emphasizes the importance of avoiding COVID-19 infection. Published recently in the [Journal of the American Medical Association's Network Open](#), the study reports that researchers at Ohio's Case Western University found that teens and adolescents were much more likely to be newly diagnosed with type 2 diabetes within six months of having COVID-19, compared to kids of the same age who were diagnosed with other respiratory infections.

Previous studies established a similar link between COVID and type 2 diabetes in adults.

Vaccines are readily available through healthcare providers and at many pharmacies. Visit [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find a pharmacy near you.

COVID-19 vaccines are available for eligible children, including those who are uninsured or underinsured, through the [Vaccines for Children \(VFC\) program](#).

In addition, the CDC has provided new funding for the 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccines to ensure access for adults without insurance or those who have insurance that does not cover COVID-19 vaccines. Adults in Ohio can contact their [local health departments](#) for vaccine availability or a local federal [Health Resources and Services Administration-supported health center](#).

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About the Ohio Department of Health

The Ohio Department of Health's mission is advancing the health and well-being of all Ohioans. ODH is transforming the state's public health system through unique partnerships and funding streams; addressing the community conditions and inequities that lead to disparities in health outcomes; and implementing data-driven, evidence-based solutions.