

## **Fighting for a breath**

I love the holidays and the gleeful excitement that comes with the approaching winter. However, all too often, illness comes with it. As a healthcare provider, I've grown used to the sniffles and the sore throats, but this year things are different. Hospitals and clinics around the state are being inundated with sick patients, and respiratory illnesses are to blame.

RSV, influenza, and COVID-19 are creating a wave of issues for healthcare systems. This problem has come to a critical point. I know providers sound the alarm each year and encourage patients to get their flu shot with many of us tuning out this call. The typical excuses usually follow this up, "I'm just fine, I don't need a shot," or "that's just for old people." I need you to set those excuses aside and look at the bigger picture. I'm a provider at a small rural hospital with only a select few beds for critically ill patients. Sometimes, we need to elevate care to larger facilities. Now, what happens when we can't do that? There are only so many beds available around the state, and now those beds are dwindling.

Much like during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are in a bed shortage. During a recent status update, I was informed that we are under two percent bed availability. This number should scare you a bit. That means if your child contracts RSV and must receive life-saving critical care, there is a chance we may be left waiting. In my work, every second counts, and we need our beds.

The rise of RSV is of particular concern to me. Pediatric departments are one by one filling up. Be especially careful with children and babies this winter. This virus can spread easily and quickly. Handwashing and covering your cough could greatly reduce the risk of RSV in your home. Currently, RSV and influenza sit at 35 percent positivity for our area. This is an alarmingly high statistic, well outside the norm for this time of year. These statistics mirror what is being experienced at the state level. Please get vaccinated and avoid large gatherings.

I'm calling upon all of you. We need help combating respiratory illnesses now and forever. Doing simple things like maintaining a clean home, avoiding sick family members, and not going out if you are sick could save lives. I would also like to strongly encourage everyone to get the flu shot. This year's flu shot has high efficacy against hospitalization from the major strain of the flu. This simple preventive measure could have an impact far beyond your own health.

I wish you a happy and healthy holiday season and new year!

Bobbi Adams  
Chief Medical Officer  
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