## Dr. Mark's Checklist for Combating the Triple Threat: COVID, Flu and RSV

Flu activity is doubling each week, new COVID variants are on the upswing and RSV is making headlines. The CDC estimates there have been at least 2.8 million illnesses, 23,000 hospitalizations and 1,300 deaths from influenza as of November 5[1]. COVID cases and hospitalizations are rising again, while deaths are fairly stable at about 330 per day.

Young children and the elderly are most at risk from RSV and a recent study[2] found that 1.8% of healthy infants are hospitalized with RSV before their first birthday. RSV is less likely to directly affect employees but it increases anxiety among parents and caregivers and can lead to absenteeism and lost productivity. In fact, The Washington Post[3] just reported that people who couldn't get to work in October because of childcare increased to the highest number seen since the Bureau of Labor Statistics started tracking this data.

People not at work because of child care problems
Among employed people aged 16+ in the U.S.; Monthly, January 2019 to October 2022
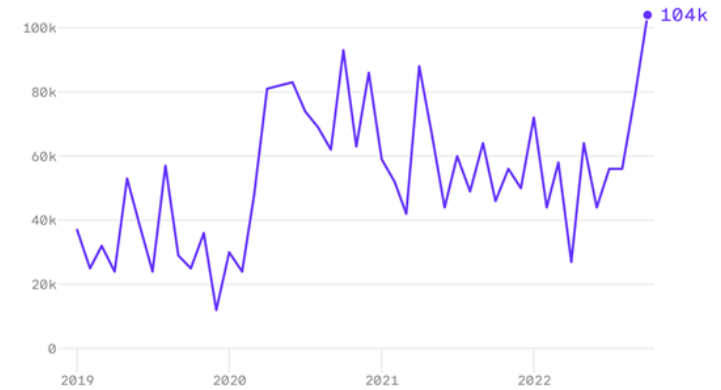
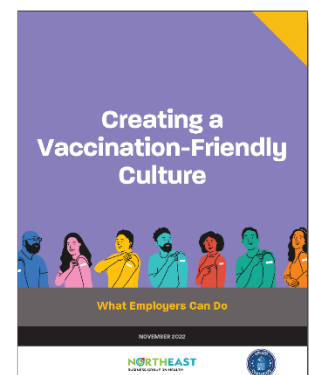**The good news? You are not powerless to address the triple threat from these viruses!**
Use this checklist for actions you can take to keep your employees healthy and at work!

1. Promote Vaccination
Provide clear, factual information on why it's important for employees and everyone around them to be vaccinated

- ☐ Make it easy for employees to get vaccinated
- ☐ Communicate your organization's commitment to vaccination
    - o Lead by example
    - o Develop effective communication campaigns
    - o Consider incentives
- ☐ Collaborate with DE&I leadership and ERGs to make sure you reach all employees
- ☐ Fight misinformation
- ☐ Promote immune fitness as part of your well-being strategy
- ☐ Make sure vaccinations don't require out-of-pocket expense
- ☐ Collect vaccination data about your employee population and set goals

Get additional information in our latest guide - *Creating a Vaccination-Friendly Culture: What Employers Can Do.* https://nebgh.org/initiative/creating-a-vaccination-friendly-culture/

Creating a Vaccination-Friendly Culture

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm
[2] https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(22)00414-3/fulltext
[3] https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/11/15/work-absences-childcare/

2. Encourage Masking

Masks really do help reduce infections – just look at how they prevented illness during the 2020-2021 flu season!

Cumulative Rate of Laboratory-Confirmed Influenza Hospitalizations among cases of all ages, 2015-16 to 2022-23, MMWR Week 43

The Mask Effect

- ☐ Consider keeping or reintroducing mask requirements in all/certain situations
- ☐ Create a mask positive culture
- ☐ Have masks readily available
- ☐ Lead by example
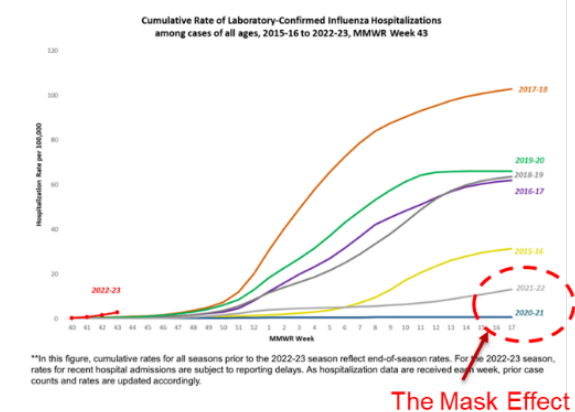
3. Ventilation

Effective ventilation can help prevent all air-borne respiratory infections and can also increase productivity. Every $40 invested in ventilation returns $6,000 to $7,000 in increased productivity, according to Dr. Joseph G. Allen, Director of the Healthy Buildings program and Associate Professor at Harvard's T. H. Chan School of Public Health.[4] Here are guidelines:

- ☐ Filtration
  - o Ensure MERV13 or higher
  - o Add portable HEPA filtration units in high-risk areas
- ☐ Air exchanges
  - o Aim for 3-8 air changes per hour
  - o Ventilate spaces before and after use
- ☐ Dilution
  - o Maintain 25+% fresh air mix
  - o Consider monitoring CO_2 levels in high occupancy spaces – aim for 800 ppm
- ☐ Germicidal Ultraviolet (GUV)
  - o Use upper room GUV
  - o Use induct GUV
- ☐ Expert opinion
  - o Consider getting an expert opinion on filtration if you haven't yet done so

4. Return to Office

With more organizations requiring employees back in the office at least a few days a week, some may have concerns about their own health and that of those around them. A flexible approach may be most effective if possible, and also appreciated by employees.

- ☐ Make sure employees know to stay home when ill!
- ☐ Minimize financial impact for employees staying home while ill – review sick leave policies
- ☐ Implement policies for those returning after COVID infection
  - o Follow CDC or enhanced protocol as a minimum – make sure to require a negative rapid antigen test(s) before returning to work
  - o Enforce masking after COVID infection
- ☐ Consider contact tracing for exceptions (vs. every case)
- ☐ Review back-up childcare benefits

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[4] https://vimeo.com/699846647?utm_medium=email&_hsmi=234058437&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9DDZJxLH4D1R74HO0F7ry9_26E5buO01LIydQFxOVOEjxBsGjPSsTo-dD5vcROnBPg0Ph9odzS23d2QnV0OxG9znfvaQ&utm_content=234058437&utm_source=hs_email#t=6m14s

5. Testing
- ☐ Encourage testing if someone is concerned about symptoms or exposure
- ☐ Consider testing prior to large in-person events or high-risk meetings
- ☐ Reduce barriers to obtaining tests – cost and availability
- ☐ Encourage testing before business travel to reduce risk of illness while away (and not all countries have removed testing requirements)