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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

To: Local Media

From: Rock County Public Health Department, Beloit Health System, Edgerton Hospital, Mercyhealth, SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Janesville

Date: November 16, 2022

Local Hospitals Warn of Increases in Respiratory Viruses

Rock County, WI – Over the past several weeks, Rock County's hospitals, including Beloit Health System, Edgerton Hospital, Mercyhealth, and SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital – Janesville, have reported increases in emergency department visits and hospitalizations due to respiratory illnesses caused by influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Respiratory viruses like influenza, COVID-19, and RSV occur in Wisconsin year-round, with higher levels of activity in fall and winter. Though cold and flu season is just underway, Rock County and other parts of Wisconsin are already seeing high levels of activity. Over the past four weeks, Rock County has seen a 35% increase in hospitalized patients with respiratory illnesses.

Rock County hospitals are typically busiest throughout fall and winter due to increases in seasonal illnesses, including respiratory illnesses, and increased medical care needs among Rock County residents. Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic had severe impacts on local health systems' capacity and bed availability. Though COVID-19 hospitalizations have been lower than previous years, recent increases in other respiratory illness activity, like flu and RSV, emphasizes the importance of disease prevention and staying healthy.

Vaccination is one of the best tools to prevent the spread and severity of respiratory viruses like flu and COVID-19. Bivalent COVID-19 "updated" booster doses that provide protection against the omicron variant of the virus are now available for everyone five years of age and older. Additionally, this year's flu vaccines are expected to offer good protection against the main flu virus strains being spread. Visit <https://www.vaccines.gov/> to find flu and COVID-19 vaccines near you.

In addition to flu and COVID-19 vaccines, use these other preventative measures to stay healthy this cold and flu season:

- Avoid close contact with those who are sick
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly for at least 20 seconds
- Avoid touching your face, especially your mouth, nose, and eyes
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces like doorknobs, light switches, and countertops

Seek care from your doctor or clinic whenever possible to prevent additional strain on local emergency departments. Telehealth options also continue to be widely available. If you need immediate medical attention for a severe or life-threatening situation, please continue to seek care at your local emergency department.

Rock County's hospitals would like to remind community members that everyone plays a role in reducing the spread of respiratory viruses this cold and flu season. Continue to take steps to minimize the risk of infection and hospitalization to ensure Rock County hospitals can effectively serve the community.

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