



# The Safe Traveler Bulletin

Health information to guide Commonwealth travelers on how to prevent illness for themselves and communities while traveling.

## Common Respiratory Viruses You May Meet While Traveling

Respiratory virus is a term you may be hearing in the news, and maybe as you talk to fellow travelers. This is an umbrella term to describe diseases that affect your airways and lungs. These viruses can easily be passed from person to person.

Some common respiratory viruses are **COVID-19**, **flu**, and **RSV**. These illnesses can make you experience fever, chills, muscle aches, fatigue, cough, runny nose, vomiting, diarrhea and sore throat.

### Know before you go.

The Department of Health's [Respiratory Virus Dashboard](#) is updated weekly during Fall and Winter.



### Monitor for symptoms before, during and after traveling.

Take your temperature, use health monitoring apps and notice if you are feeling sick. Marking your symptoms on a calendar may help you provide details about your illness when you talk to your medical provider.



### Practicing good hygiene during travel keeps you healthy.

Covering your coughs and sneezes, washing or sanitizing your hands often, and using disinfectant wipes on frequently touched surfaces when you are in crowded transportation hubs, such as airports, train and bus stations.



### Respiratory virus vaccines are safe and effective.

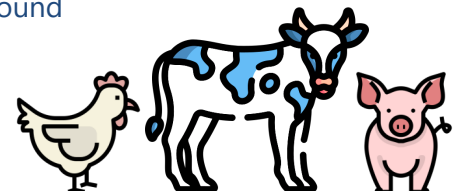
Schedule vaccinations for a few weeks before you travel to reduce your chances of becoming very ill. The recommended 2024-2025 Fall/Winter virus season information is available at [Immunizations | Department of Health | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania](#).

## Uncommon Respiratory Viruses That You May Meet at Farms and Petting Zoos

**Bird flu**, also known as avian influenza, can make wild birds, chickens, turkeys, and other animals like goats, cows, foxes, and cats sick. Though rare, you can catch bird flu from sick animals, from surfaces that sick animals have touched, or by having contact with [raw milk from sick cows](#).

### Protect yourself against bird and variant flu by:

- Washing your hands before and after handling animals and again before eating. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available. Make sure to remove all waste, feathers, and dirt before cleaning your hands.
- Avoid touching your face, eating, or drinking, around animals and their environment.
- Teaching kids that kissing birds or farm animals can make them sick.



Contact the Bureau of Epidemiology

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# What to Know About Emerging Infectious Diseases

**Vancomycin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus**

**Cryptosporidiosis**

**Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (TB)**

**Drug-resistant malaria**

**V-Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease**

**Diphtheria**

**E.coli O157:H7**

**Oropouche**

**Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome**

**Dengue hemorrhagic fever:** South America, countries including Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Paraguay, Colombia, and Ecuador have reported a record breaking number of dengue cases from 1/1–6/24/2024; Pennsylvania has reported 23 dengue cases among travelers during this same period. **Travelers to risk areas** should prevent mosquito bites by using an [EPA-registered insect repellent](#), wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants outdoors, and sleeping in an air-conditioned room or room with window screens.

**Lassa fever**

**Cholera**

**Ebola hemorrhagic fever**

**Plague**

**HIV**

**Typhoid fever**

**Rift Valley fever**

**H5N1 Bird flu**

**Mpox:** The World Health Organization (WHO) determined that the increase of [mpox](#) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and a growing number of countries in Africa constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) under the International Health Regulation in August of 2024.



“Whether you are traveling locally to your favorite hiking trail or to an exciting new destination on your bucket list, known and unknown health threats are all around.” - **Eva Gordian-Rivera, DrPH**, Pennsylvania Department of Health’s Emerging Infectious Disease Epidemiologist discusses diseases of concern and best practices to prevent them while on the go.

## Can you explain what emerging infectious diseases are?

Emerging infectious diseases can be new diseases making people sick for the first time or existing diseases that have recently appeared in a new group of people or a new region or territory.

## What is the difference between newly emerging infectious diseases and re-emerging infectious diseases?

Emerging infectious diseases are those that have recently started to affect people. Re-emerging infectious diseases have been around for a while but continue to come back in new forms (such as variants or mutations.) Or they were thought to be gone or under control but came back again. For example, influenza mutations are considered re-emerging infectious diseases. This is why public health staff focus on trying to understand the flu virus.

## Can you provide examples of both?

For example, [COVID-19](#) and the [Bourbon virus](#) are newly emerging infectious diseases, whereas measles and antibiotic-resistant bacteria, like [Staph](#), are examples of re-emerging diseases.

## Which should travelers be most concerned about: emerging diseases or re-emerging diseases?

When traveling, it's important to be aware of re-emerging diseases (those we have encountered in the past, and may return in a more complex and infectious form) like measles. Re-emerging diseases are highly contagious and can cause serious health problems for you and your family.

For example, measles is highly contagious and can lead to severe health complications. The virus is transmitted through direct contact with infectious droplets or airborne spread. It can remain infectious in the air and on surfaces for up to 2 hours after an infected person leaves an area. However, we have the necessary tools for prevention and control measures.

## What is the best way people can protect themselves against emerging diseases while traveling?

When you're traveling, it's really important to get vaccinated and wash your hands often to stay safe from infectious diseases that are making a comeback. For instance, getting the [measles, mumps, and rubella \(MMR\) vaccine](#) can protect you from measles, so it's a good idea to get vaccinated before traveling.

## How can people check on any emerging infectious diseases at their destination while planning a trip?

You can check for emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases at your destination by looking up the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Travel Health Notices](#). These notices provide information about health risks during outbreaks and advise travelers on protective actions to prevent infection.

