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D.O.H. Confirms Presence of RSV in Territory, Warns of Worse Outcomes if RSV and Covid Combine

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The V.I. Department of Health on Sunday announced the presence of the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in the community — a common virus that most children encounter by their second birthday. D.O.H. is urging parents to vaccinate their children against the flu and Covid-19.

Though RSV typically infects children, it can also affect adults and lead to severe complications in those with weakened immune systems, D.O.H. said.

RSV symptoms include fever, cough, and runny nose. However, it can also cause pneumonia or bronchiolitis, which are lung infections requiring oxygen and antibiotics in a hospital setting. RSV can also cause various complications depending on a person's age and health status, D.O.H. said.

RSV cases have been surging on the U.S. mainland, and for every 100,000 people who were infected with RSV, 3.0 were hospitalized during the week ending Nov. 5, according to federal data from 12 states.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, infants six to 12 months old were hospitalized at a rate of 63 for every 100,000 children that age. The hospitalization rate is 0.6 per 100,000 people for adults.

Hospitals in the territory reported several treated cases of RSV in the fall months, D.O.H. said. The Schneider Regional Medical Center reported 6 hospitalizations and the Juan F. Luis Medical Center reported 1 hospitalization during this fall season.

"RSV, influenza, and Covid-19 can cause very similar symptoms and complications," D.O.H. said. "Co-infections with more than 1 of these viruses can occur and cause worse outcomes."

In light of these risks, D.O.H. is urging parents to vaccinate their children ages 6 months and older against influenza and Covid-19. "There is currently no vaccine for RSV. Please conduct respiratory hygiene with frequent hand-washing, coughing into elbows/tissue, and staying at home while sick," the health department said.