



CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER UPDATE

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO EVERYONE

As we close out another year, December offers us a time to reflect on the successes and challenges we have faced as a community. From strengthening our collective resilience to addressing both ongoing and emerging health concerns, 2025 has been a year that reminds us of the power of unity and compassion. In a time of uncertainty, we've seen how coming together we can spark a shared purpose. As we look ahead to 2026, may we continue to uplift our family, friends, neighbors and



communities, to shape a brighter tomorrow for all. Whether you're preparing for the winter weather, promoting wellness during the holidays, or planning for the new year, we hope these key health reminders help keep you and your communities safe.

VACCINATION

Hepatitis B

Montgomery County reaffirms our commitment to following public health recommendations that are guided by science and evidence-based data for vaccine recommendations, including the safe and effectiveness of routine administration of the hepatitis B vaccines to newborns in accordance with the [American Academy of Pediatrics Recommended Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule for Ages 18 Years or Younger](#). The Maryland Department of Health issued a [Standing Order](#) effective December 5, 2025, following AAP Guidelines.

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease (1). Hepatitis B is extremely contagious and the leading cause of liver cancer worldwide (2). Newborns can acquire hepatitis B at birth if the mother is infected with the virus (3). Since adopting the universal hepatitis B vaccination for newborns in 1991, hepatitis B infections have decreased by 99% among children and teens (4). After completing the full 3 to 4- dose vaccination series, 98% of healthy infants achieve full immunity to the virus (3).

The decisions made by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) should not impact insurance coverage of any hepatitis B vaccine dose in Maryland.

DECEMBER 2025



Flu, COVID, RSV

National Influenza Vaccination Week (Dec 1 to Dec 5, 2025), is a national awareness campaign to remind everyone, 6 months and older, that there is still time to get a flu vaccine. As we prepare for the upcoming holidays, let's keep our loved ones safe by getting a flu and COVID-19 vaccine. RSV vaccines are

recommended for pregnant persons at 32 to 36 weeks, adults 75 and older (ages 50-74 at increased risk), and infants under 8 months without maternal protection. Stay up to date with recommended immunizations and practice good hygiene (e.g., washing your hands) to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses including COVID-19, flu, and RSV.

Below is a guidance on how to tell the difference between flu, RSV, COVID-19 and the common cold. But regardless of what you may have, stay home and away from others if you have a respiratory virus.

HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FLU, RSV, COVID-19, AND THE COMMON COLD				
Common symptoms may include cough, headaches, sneezing, runny nose, and congestion. Different symptoms may include:				
	COLD	FLU	COVID-19	RSV
ACHES	○○	×××	○○	●
DIFFICULTY BREATHING	●	●	×××	○○
FATIGUE	○○	×××	×××	●
FEVER	●	×××	○○	○○
LOSS OF TASTE OR SMELL	●	●	○○	●
SORE THROAT	×××	○○	×××	●
WHEEZING	●	●	●	×××

Source: National Infectious Disease Foundation

Free Adult Vaccine Program

On November 20, 2025, Governor Wes Moore announced the first-of-its kind adult vaccine program to expand access to critical immunizations for uninsured and underinsured Marylanders. The program will provide recommended adult vaccines for adults aged 19 and older at local health departments free of cost.

Montgomery County is one of four counties participating in the pilot. Additional information will be provided once the vaccines become available to the general public.

MENTAL HEALTH

While the holidays can be a joyful and festive time, they can also bring feelings of loneliness, sadness, and stress. In the United States, nearly 9 in 10 experience stress during the holidays and 64% of individuals living with a mental health illness report that their conditions worsen around this time (5,6).

Some tips to manage your mental health during this season:

1. **Recognize** common stressors and identify early signs of mental health challenges
2. **Practice** self-care
3. **Manage** holiday-related expectations
4. **Focus** on physical health and nutrition
5. **Find** support and stay connected
6. **Practice** gratitude exercises
7. **Seek** help

The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) has created a toolkit with tips on how to navigate the holidays and prioritize your mental wellbeing: [MHFA-Mental-Wellbeing-Holiday-Toolkit.pdf](#).

It's important to recognize that this season affects everyone differently. Let's continue to extend kindness, understanding, and support wherever we can. You are not alone.

If you are in crisis, please reach out for help. Call, text, chat 24/7

- **Dial or Text 9-8-8** (the National Crisis Hotline)
- **Dial 301-738-2255 or text 301-738-2255** (the Montgomery County Hotline)

For more tips, you can visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website [Support during the Holidays](#).



DECEMBER 2025

DRIVE SOBER

The holiday season is a time for celebration and joy, but it can quickly turn tragic due to impaired driving. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), more than 4,000 lives were lost in December between 2019 and 2023 as a result of drunk driving.

- Always drive 100% sober.
- Before you even have one drink, designate a sober driver to get you home safely.
- Support others in making safe choices, never let someone drive impaired.
- Use safe transportation options like taxis, rideshare services, or public transit.

Visit the Montgomery County Vision Zero *Find a Safe Ride Home* page to access more information on safe transportation options:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/visionzero/saferide.html>

Let's make sure everyone gets home safely to celebrate with the people they love. Together, we can prevent impaired driving and protect our community.

WORLD AIDS DAY

On December 1, 2025, we honored World Aids Day with the Montgomery County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority at the *Reclaiming our Power Solidarity of Health Equity Breakfast*. According to 2023 data, more than 4,000 individuals in Montgomery County are living with HIV. Black residents (59.5%) are disproportionately impacted, highlighting significant disparities in HIV prevalence.

Montgomery County aims to reduce 90% of new HIV infection by 2030. Our Sexual Health and Wellness Services provide HIV and STI testing, treatment, and prevention services (PrEP, condoms and more). Visit our website to learn more about our services:

<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/hiv/>



(1) WHO. (2025). Hepatitis B. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-b>

(2) Rosen, A. (2025). Hepatitis B Vaccination is an Essential Safety Net for Newborn. Bloomberg School of Public Health. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/why-hepatitis-b-vaccination-begins-at-birth>

(3) AAP. (2025). Fact Checked: Hepatitis B Vaccine Given to Newborns Reduces Risk of Chronic Infection. <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/fact-checked/fact-checked-hepatitis-b-vaccine-given-to-newborns-reduces-risk-of-chronic-infection/>

(4) MDH. (2025). Maryland Department of Health reiterates importance of full hepatitis B vaccination schedule for all newborns; issues guidance, standing order to help maintain access.

<https://health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/MDH%20reiterates%20importance%20of%20full%20hepatitis%20B%20vaccination%20schedule%20for%20all%20newborns;%20issues%20guidance,%20standing%20order.aspx>

(5) APA. (2023). Even a joyous holiday season can cause stress for most Americans. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2023/11/holiday-season-stress>

(6) Bommersbach, T. (2023). Supporting Your Mental Health During the Holiday Season. SAMHSA. <https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/supporting-your-mental-health-during-holiday-season>