

Health Matters

FALL 2025

Don't fall for the flu!

Learn strategies to help decrease the spread of respiratory illnesses

Respiratory illnesses like Influenza virus (flu), COVID-19, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) spread easily in the fall and winter, when people spend more time together indoors and students are back in schools. These illnesses affect your respiratory system (your nose, throat, and lungs) and can affect your breathing and cause congestion.

How to Prevent Getting Sick:

Here are some simple but effective steps we can take to help reduce the spread this Fall:

1. Build a Strong Immune System: Keep your immune system strong by eating a balanced diet, avoiding alcohol and smoking, staying active, and getting enough sleep. Find other ways to boost your immune system from Harvard Health:

www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/how-to-boost-your-immune-system

2. Practice Good Hygiene: Like washing your hands regularly for 20 seconds, using hand sanitizer on the go, and cleaning commonly touched surfaces. Taking other simple steps, like covering coughs and sneezes, avoiding sharing food and drinks, and wearing a well-fitting mask in crowded indoor environments can help.

3. Get Vaccinated: Getting your recommended vaccines is the best way to prevent severe disease. Everyone ages 6 months and older should receive an annual flu vaccine. Updated COVID-19 are especially important for people at higher risk, like older adults and people with weakened immune systems. Learn more about flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccines by visiting our immunizations page here:

www.islandcountywa.gov/1072/Immunizations

Visit the Island County Public Health Seasonal Respiratory Illness web page for more information: www.islandcountywa.gov/825/Respiratory-Illnesses

What to do if you get sick:

Symptoms can vary but the most common include runny nose, coughing, sneezing, tiredness, fever, and sore throat.

- If you have mild symptoms and are not high-risk: Stay home and away from others until you have been fever-free for 24 hours (without using fever-reducing medication) and your symptoms are improving. Take over-the-counter medications to ease symptoms, rest, and drink plenty of fluids.
- If you have more intense symptoms or are part of a high-risk group: Call your healthcare provider or local clinic.
- If you have severe symptoms such as trouble breathing, seek emergency medical attention immediately.

Why Vaccinate?

Vaccines are one of the most powerful tools for staying healthy. They are a safe and effective way to train your body to fight off serious disease, helping prevent hospital stays, long-lasting health problems, or even death.

Managing Noxious Weeds in the Fall

Fall Weed Control for a Healthier Yard Next Spring

While the leaves are beginning to turn, and plants are starting to die back as they get ready for winter, there are still many valuable actions you can take to help you in your efforts to control or get rid of noxious weeds from your property. Noxious weeds are officially listed invasive plants that harm the environment by aggressively taking over natural areas and crowding out the native plants that local wildlife need to survive.

Minimize seed dispersal: With many plants now having produced viable seed, clipping seed heads and bagging them can help prevent excessive germination in the spring. Island County Solid Waste offers free disposal at its facilities for noxious weeds coming from Island County residents. Please ensure that your weeds are secured so you are not accidentally spreading seed.

Cut stump treatments: Since plants are beginning to pull nutrients into their roots for winter, Fall is a great time to treat woody, shrub-like invasives such as spurge laurel, English holly, and Scotch broom. Cut the plant at the base of the stem and apply herbicide to the freshly exposed tissue. Always remember to follow the instructions on the label and use safety gear, like gloves, when working with herbicides.

Re-vegetation with natives or other competitive species: Planting perennial shrubs in September/October can help them establish and compete with noxious weeds that will

emerge in the spring. If you're not quite ready to re-plant in an area you are clearing, consider mulching or tarping the cleared area to stop remaining weeds from sprouting or blowing in from nearby areas and taking over a site.

Begin control of winter-emergent species: With our milder marine climate, there are some noxious weed species that can grow year-round or naturally sprout in the late fall/early winter months. Yellow archangel, spurge laurel, and Italian arum are all noxious weed species that can be pulled by hand during the fall and winter. Using this window gives you control before they create seeds in the early spring months.

Learn more about noxious weeds by visiting our webpage:
www.islandcountywa.gov/344/Island-County-Noxious-Weed-Control-Program

Preventing Mold During the Wet Season

Learn why mold grows in your home and how to prevent it.

If you happen to find mold in your home, there are plenty of ways to safely clean it - protecting your home and your health.

Resources:

- Mold prevention and treatment in your home youtu.be/2dibO6SpbBE
- Washington State Dept. of Health: Mold www.doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/contaminants/mold

As the weather gets cold, keep active!

Find ways to move more during the colder months

As the weather becomes cooler and the days shorter, Fall often brings a natural slowdown, and it may be tempting to stay indoors. But maintaining physical activity is crucial for both physical and mental health. There are so many reasons to continue (or start) doing at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity (like a brisk walk) physical activity each week. This can be divided into shorter workouts of 30 minutes, five days a week, which still works to improve cardiovascular, respiratory, and muscular health and to boost mood and cognitive function.

On Whidbey and Camano Islands, the darker days of winter can affect your mood as lower exposure to sunlight can lead to drops in serotonin levels (a chemical in your brain

that helps you feel happy), which may also affect your motivation. Exercise, however, has been shown to increase serotonin and endorphin levels naturally, offering a protective effect against mood changes and even seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

Local Ways to Stay Active

Luckily, Island County has plenty to offer in the winter months.

- Hiking is a great option. While you may usually think of the mountains for hikes, Whidbey and Camano have plenty of beach and forest hikes. Need some inspiration? Sno-Isle libraries often stock good hiking guides on our islands and the surrounding area. Try 'Getting to the Water's Edge' published by Sound Water Stewards. www.soundwaterstewards.org/education-center/getting-to-the-waters-edge/
- Explore Accessible Trails. For those using wheelchairs, walkers, or strollers, or anyone looking for a gentler walk, our county has wonderful ADA-accessible trails. The Whidbey Camano Land Trust Shares ADA accessible trails here: www.wclt.org/protected-properties/
- Road or mountain biking is another good option. Don't forget to wear high visibility clothing and a helmet. You can find local biking information here: www.islandcountywa.gov/684/Bicycling-in-Island-County
- Explore indoor class options, such as yoga, tai chi, or SAIL (Staying Active and Independent for Life). Find local SAIL classes here: www.islandcountywa.gov/301/Falls-Prevention
Dance fitness classes are now offered by the YMCA, available both at Camp Casey and Stanwood.
- Indoor pools offer a fantastic, low-impact workout that is easy on the joints. Other indoor options include home workouts and exercising at gyms. Find simple ways to stay active and move more: www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/physical-activity/getting-started.html

Benefits of Exercise for Seasonal Health

- Strengthens the immune system
- Improves white blood cell circulation to fight colds and flu
- Promotes better sleep that enhances immunity
- Supports metabolic health by balancing blood sugar and aiding digestion
- Sustains energy levels and reduces seasonal sluggishness

Accessible Resources for Everyone

www.odphp.health.gov/moveyourway

www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/

www.getting-active/how-to-be-more-active-at-work

Older Adults: www.nia.nih.gov/exercise-toolkit

www.islandcountywa.gov/301/Falls-Prevention

People with Disabilities: www.nchpad.org/resources/my-scorecard-exercise/

Cost Effective Activities: www.islandcountywa.gov/351/Healthy-Island-Youth-Initiative

Well water: When and how to get it tested?

What is water quality?

Water quality refers to the physical, biological, and chemical characteristics of water. The characteristics of water can change as water moves through, and interacts with, the environment. It's essential to ensure that the water we rely on everyday does not have unsafe levels of contaminants, like bacteria, nitrate, arsenic, manganese, and chloride. To protect your health, water quality should be tested regularly and treated if necessary. If your water is supplied by a public water system, reach out to your water system to learn more about your water quality. For individual well owners, it's up to homeowners to complete regular testing.

When and how do I test my well? If your water is supplied by a private well, yearly water quality testing is recommended but not required. It is the private well owner's responsibility to test their well water and treat if needed.

Yearly Water Quality Testing Recommendations:

- Coliform bacteria
- Nitrate
- Additional tests if there are other concerns

How to Test Your Private Well:

1. Get sample bottles and lab forms from a state accredited lab. Bottles and forms for Eurofins-Edge Analytical can be picked up at the Island County Public Health Department's Coupeville and Camano Island offices.
2. Collect the water samples according to the instructions on the back of the lab forms.
3. Fill out the lab forms and arrange payment with the lab.
4. Drop off the water samples and lab forms at the lab or drop off locations. Bottles and forms can be dropped off at the Public Health office in Coupeville, Island H2O in Oak Harbor, or Eurofins-Edge Analytical Labs in Burlington.

To learn more, check out the Island County Drinking Water Program:

www.islandcountywa.gov/658/Drinking-Water

Still have questions about water quality? Email us at:

DrinkingWater@islandcountywa.gov

The Island County Wellness Wagon 2025 Tour

First Stop: Island Senior Resources

The Island County Wellness Wagon made its debut at Island Senior Services in September, offering blood pressure screenings and health information to the public. Our van will be visiting several locations throughout the year. To keep informed, subscribe to our Public Health News Updates: www.islandcountywa.gov/list.aspx

Data Corner

Did you know Island County Public Health offers data support? Suppose you have a board that is curious about the demographics in Island County, or you are curious how many people receive SNAP benefits so you can make strategic decisions about your food pantry, or you're a community member researching chronic disease levels. In that case, we have a team that can help you! Please visit:

www.islandcountywa.gov/759/Health-Data-Requests

Falls Prevention Facts

Did you know that medications can be a major root cause of older adult falls? This is why it is always important to talk to your providers about any medications you may be taking. For more information on preventing falls, go to:

www.islandcountywa.gov/301/Older-Adult-Falls-Prevention