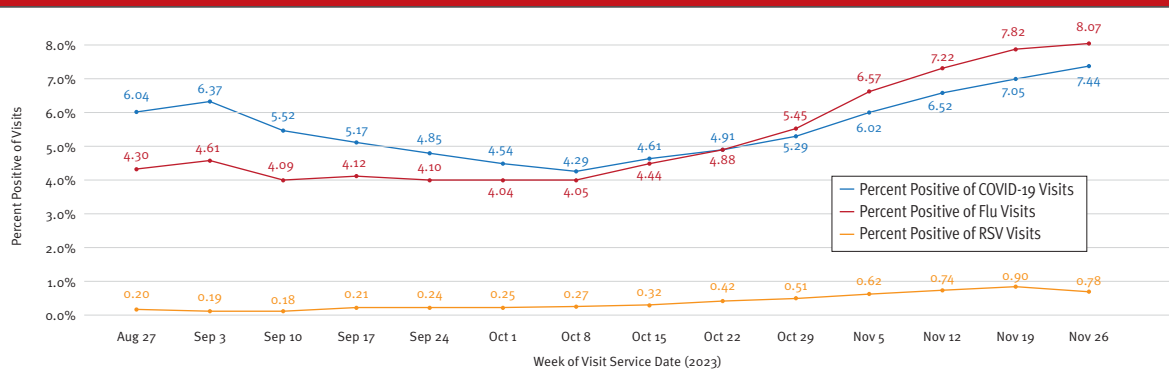


# Flu Season Begins For Urgent Care

Julie Miller

Percentage of UC Visits With Positive Test Result for COVID-19, Influenza, RSV



In late November, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted that the number of healthcare visits related to influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) was particularly high among children, causing concern in communities about this “triple-demic” of respiratory illness.

According to Experity data, the first week of October ushered in flu season for urgent care, when positivity rates for the three viruses among all urgent care center visits began to rise.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the trendlines have continued a steady climb, which is typical for this time of year, with peak season expected to occur between December and February.

For the 14 weeks observed by Experity, flu positivity recorded a low of 4.04% and a high of 8.07%—a near doubling in the number of positive cases over the time period. The week of October 22, 2023, was a turning point for positive flu cases as they surpassed the number of positive COVID-19 cases presenting to urgent care centers. Positive tests for SARS-CoV-2 among patient visits saw a low of 4.29% and a high of 7.44%—a 73% increase in the weeks

observed. RSV demonstrated a low of 0.18% and a high of 0.90%, with the most recent week showing a slight downturn in positive cases. RSV is of particular concern because older adults and infants are more likely to develop severe cases that lead to hospitalization.<sup>2</sup>

To compare against national trends, urgent care operators can look to CDC data. The agency reports the percentage of positive results based on the number of specimens collected—not on the number of healthcare visits. Its data revealed influenza positivity at 6.8% of tests, COVID-19 positivity at 11.7%, and RSV positivity at 11.5% for the week ending December 2, 2023.<sup>3,4</sup>

For urgent care centers, the most important concern during respiratory illness season is the clinical decision to determine which patients are appropriate for referral to an emergency department for treatment and which patients are appropriate for recovery at home. ■

**References**

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