

THE DOSE

The Dose (January 3)

Respiratory season is getting ugly, Covid vaccines are effective, Costco eggs, and H5N1, backyard flocks and bird feeders.



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JAN 03, 2025



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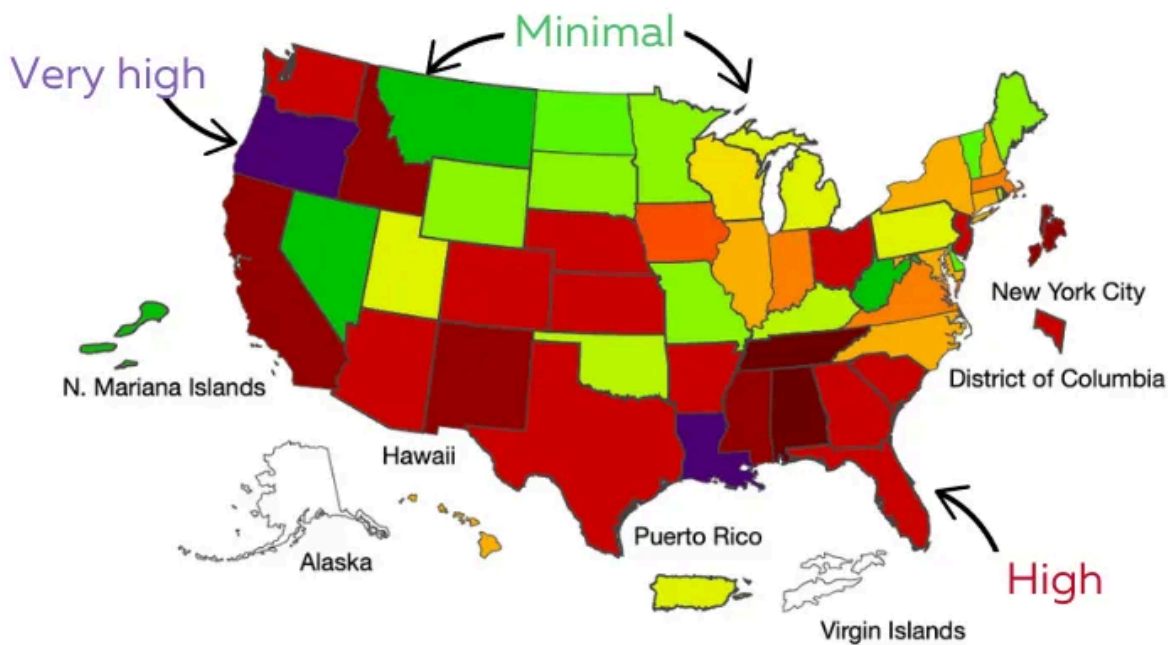
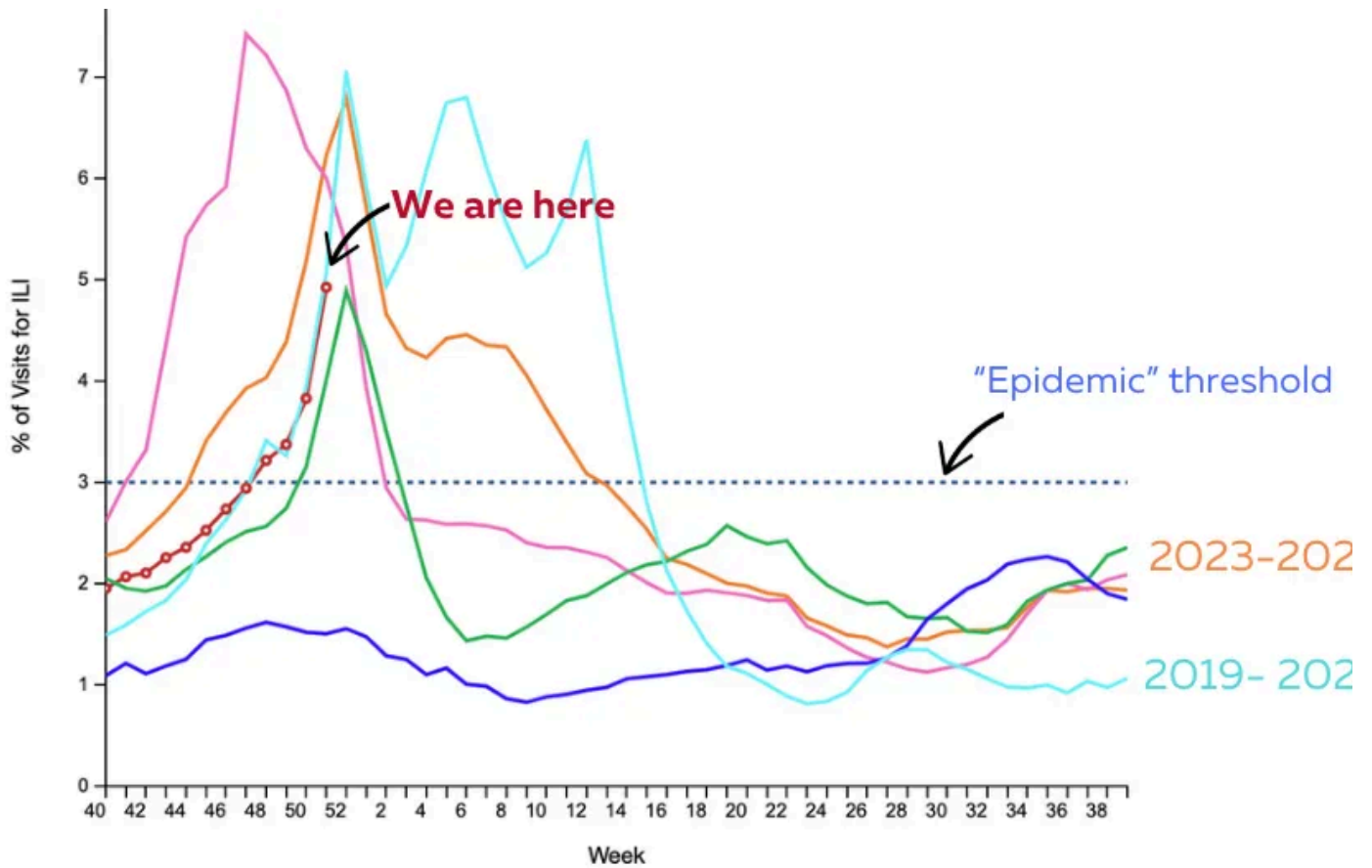
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Happy New Year! We're back to it after some much-needed time off. Here's the pub health news you can use this week.

Fall respiratory weather report: High and increasing

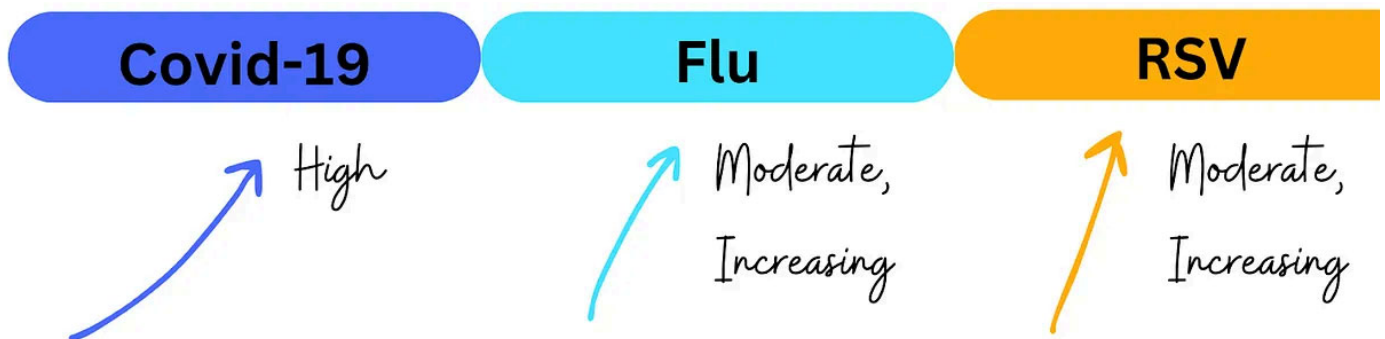
It's getting ugly out there, folks. The number of people going to the doctor for a cough or fever (defined as an "influenza-like illness" or ILI) is well above epidemic levels at this point. The sickest communities are in the West and South, but the entire map below will soon be lit up red.



Levels of ILI; Source: [CDC](#); Annotated by YLE

The “big three”—flu, Covid-19, and RSV—are increasing quickly. Flu is causing the most burden on healthcare systems, but Covid-19 wastewater is increasing fast, wh

means hospitalizations and deaths will soon follow.



Wastewater viral activity. Source: [CDC](#)

Norovirus—think nausea, vomiting, diarrhea—continues to have quite the season, with the number of [positive tests](#) and [outbreaks](#) abnormally high. Norovirus spreads through contaminated surfaces, so as always, wash those hands. Unfortunately, this virus is one of the hardest viruses to kill, so a quick dose of hand sanitizer doesn't work. Bleach-based products on surfaces are the best.

Fall Covid-19 vaccine provides additional protection

The first data on the effectiveness of this fall's 2024-2025 Covid-19 vaccine is in, and it's looking good!

A [preprint](#) was released on patients at a Veterans Affairs hospital. Scientists tallied number of people who did (and did not) have Covid-19 from September- November 2024 and whether they got this fall's Covid-19 vaccine (specifically the Pfizer 2024-2025 KP.2 formula). Among 44,598 infections, the Covid-19 vaccine reduces:

- Hospitalizations by 68%
- Emergency department and urgent care visits by 57%, and
- Outpatient visits by 56%

The vaccine worked best for those over 65 years old. This study is very preliminary (it only covered two months with little Covid-19 transmission), but the findings aren't surprising—they are generally consistent with what scientists have found in previous years.

It's easy to wonder if we've had *enough* Covid-19 boosters by now, but as the virus mutates, vaccines—like flu vaccines every year—provide additional protection to our immune systems.

H5N1, severe disease, backyard flocks, and birdfeeders

A Louisiana resident is in the hospital after contracting H5N1 from their backyard flock. This case had the same H5N1 strain as a teenager in Canada who was fighting for their life last month. (A recent [NEJM case study](#) described how severely sick this teenager was: intubation for 3 weeks, temporary support to the heart and lungs called ECMO, plasma exchange, 3 antiviral medications, and more.) The H5N1 strain involved in both severe cases—called D1.1—is found among birds and differs from strain circulating among cows (B3.13).

If you have a backyard flock, you should take [precautions](#) to reduce the risk of spreading disease:

1. Keep your flock contained: isolate your birds from visitors and other birds.
2. Prevent germs from spreading by cleaning shoes, tools, and equipment.
3. Reduce the risk of transmission by avoiding sharing tools and equipment with neighbors.
4. Know the [warning signs of infectious bird diseases](#) among the flock, including fatigue, abnormal drop in egg production, swelling or discoloration of the eyelids/comb/wattles/shanks, stumbling or falling down, diarrhea, or unexplained death.

If one of your birds is sick or dies unexpectedly:

1. Avoid contact with the sick or dead bird. Assume other birds in the flock and the enclosures, droppings, feeders, and water sources are also infectious. (If you cannot avoid contact completely, [take steps to protect yourself](#).)
2. If possible, isolate the bird from other animals and pets. (Don't let your dog near it.)
3. Immediately [report](#) sick or dead birds to your state veterinarian or the U.S. Department of Agriculture (1-866-536-7593).

What about bird feeders? Birds that gather at feeders (like cardinals, sparrows, and bluebirds) [do not](#) typically carry H5N1. The USDA [does not recommend](#) removing backyard bird feeders for H5N1 prevention *unless* you also care for poultry. The less contact between wild birds and poultry (by removing sources of food, water, and shelter), the better.

Beware of salmonella linked to some Costco eggs

FDA set the highest safety alert—a [Class I recall](#)—for some Costco eggs, distributed in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Handsome Brook Farms Kirkland brand of organic pasture-raised eggs is linked to possible *Salmonella* exposure.



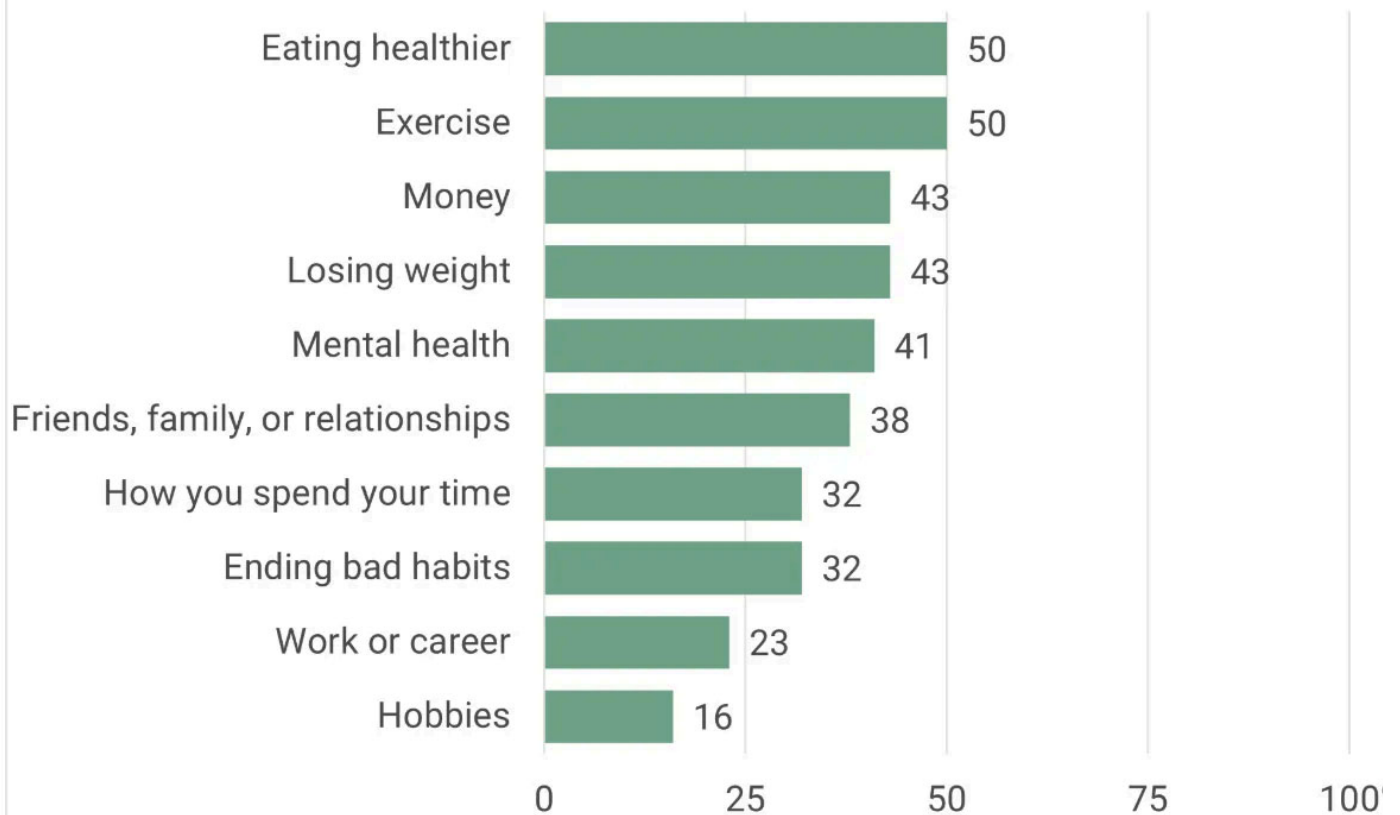
Class I designations are reserved for products with the highest possible health risk, meaning there's a "reasonable probability that the use of or exposure to a violative product will cause serious adverse health consequences or death." There are no recorded human cases yet, but let's keep it that way—spread the word and throw the eggs out if you have them in your fridge.

So... what'll be "healthy" in 2025?

'Tis the season of New Year's resolutions! According to a [recent AP poll](#), most resolutions this year focus on health, exercise, and diet.

Most New Year resolutions focus on health, exercise, or diet.

Percent of adults who plan to make at least one New Year's resolution



Question: Are you planning to make a New Year's resolution about:

Source: AP-NORC poll conducted December 5-9, 2024 with 1,251 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



APNORC.org

Fifty percent of people aim to eat healthier, but what's really considered *healthy* the days? Well, just in time for the new year, FDA [updated](#) the definition to align with the latest science. (The last time this definition was updated for food labeling requirements was in 1994!)

Starting in February 25, 2025, if a company wants to claim their new food is "health on a package, they must meet two requirements:

1. The food must contain a **certain amount** of one of the **five food groups** (fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, dairy).
2. The food cannot exceed added sugar, sodium, or saturated fat **limits** based on the food and its **customarily consumed amounts**.

The changes remove limitations on total fat and cholesterol and the required provisions of vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, iron, protein, and fiber—things that can simply be added to foods.

Basically, this **updated definition** aims to focus on more nutrient-dense foods, emphasizing food groups (and the overall nutrition profile) rather than individual nutrients in isolation. While this is progress in the right direction, it's imperfect. For example, full-fat plain yogurt cannot be “healthy” under this guidance, but low-fat flavored yogurt with some added sugar could be.

What's next? Reporting food as “healthy” is voluntary. Foods already on the market must comply by February 2028.

In the meantime, FDA is developing a “**healthy**” **symbol** that could be used for **front-of-package labeling**. While only time and research will tell how effective these labeling strategies are, it's a step in the right direction, updating considerably outdated nutrition guidance, encouraging industry to reformulate foods, and making it easier for the public to make healthier choices.

Bottom line

You're all caught up for the beginning of the year! Have a wonderful weekend.

Love, the YLE team

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Lyn Banghart 3d

My husband and I both have RSV. (We tested positive) We are both 75. And I will tell you it is the virus we have ever had. It has been a week now and we are still miserable and coughing. It has gotten our lungs, my husband worse than I and we have seen the doctor who is keeping tabs on us. We did not get the vaccine. And I so wish that we had...

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Paul DeLong 3d

As usual vital and relevant information grounded in scientific reality. Keep on keeping on, doc!!!

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