

What happened to the flu season in Florida?

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Several weeks into 2022 and Florida's flu season appears to be nearly non-existent.

For the first three weeks of the new year, typically the height of the season, flu has been at low levels across the state.

In South Florida's tri-county area, influenza activity actually has declined each week in January and is below the previous three-season level, Florida's weekly Flu Review shows.

Doctors and nurse practitioners throughout South Florida attribute fewer cases of flu to multiple factors, and don't expect to see a repeat of the horrid flu season the state endured in early 2020 just as COVID was arriving.



At Holy Cross Urgent Care, Dr. Zynab Hassan said her two South Florida clinics had begun to see an increase in people testing positive for the flu just as delta receded. "Once omicron arrived it overpowered influenza," said Hassan, medical director.

Now her clinics are seeing more patients with colds, bronchitis and strep.

"Usually with colds, you will see sniffles and runny noses," Hassan said. "When you start looking at the flu or COVID, that's when the headaches, body aches, fever and chills come in. We rule out flu and COVID with testing and then pretty much try to treat the symptoms."

As flu season approached late in 2021, scientists expressed concern that people could catch flu and coronavirus at the same time, calling it "flurona." Hassan said her clinics have seen only a few cases of flurona. "Those people are sicker longer," she said.

Even with fewer flu cases this year, about 1,500 patients are in U.S. hospitals with laboratory-confirmed influenza. The most at risk, according to CDC hospitalization data, are people over age 65. If the flu is confirmed early, antiviral treatments can help make symptoms less severe and shorten recovery time.

"We still encourage patients to get a flu vaccine because it does minimize symptoms and if they do catch it they don't end up having it as long," Hassan said.

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