**(Providers can copy/paste this TEMPLATE into their own letterhead for patients.)**

Name
Address
City, WA Zip

Date

Re: Respiratory Viruses and Where to Get Care

Dear (patient),

The nation is seeing an early and more severe respiratory virus season. Here in Washington state, we are seeing influenza cases earlier than usual and rates are on the increase. COVID-19 is also still with us. Additionally, this season we are also seeing more respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which usually causes common cold like symptoms that get better on their own but can sometimes be a cause of hospitalization for infants and the elderly. Together these respiratory viruses are causing a severe strain on our emergency departments and hospitals.

The best weapon we have against respiratory viruses is prevention. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) **strongly recommends everyone 6 months and older get their yearly flu vaccine and be up to date on COVID-19 boosters**. There is plenty of flu and COVID-19 vaccine available in our state. Most places that offer COVID-19 vaccine also offer flu vaccine, and you can receive both at the same time. You can find a location with vaccine at https://vaccinelocator.doh.wa.gov

There are several things you and your family can do to lower your risk of illness and spread of all respiratory viruses:

* Wash your hands often for at least 20 seconds with sudsy soap in warm water, or with hand sanitizer if soap and water is not convenient.
* Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose where germs like to enter.
* Stay home when you’re sick (even if it is “just a cold”) and isolate sick household members in separate rooms.
* Wear a mask in crowded or poorly ventilated settings
* Limit the number of close contacts for young infants and individuals with certain chronic conditions.
* Clean high-touch surfaces frequently with a cleaner that is known to kill these common viruses.

If your child does end up getting sick, and you think they need to be seen, it is important to choose the right level of care.

* Call a nurse advice line if your health insurer has one
* Call your child’s provider or after-hours service first to see where you should go.
* Check if telehealth (virtual medical visit) is an option in your area and on your medical plan.
* Consider urgent care if a higher level of care is needed, for example if your child has dehydration, pauses or difficulty breathing, poor color, or significantly decreased activity and alertness.
* If it is a true emergency, go to your nearest emergency room or call 9-1-1.

More information on caring for children with respiratory virus infections is available from the American Academy of Pediatrics at <https://healthychildren.org>.

Sincerely,

(Physician or Practice)