

Influenza Season Is Here Early This Year

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Key Takeaways

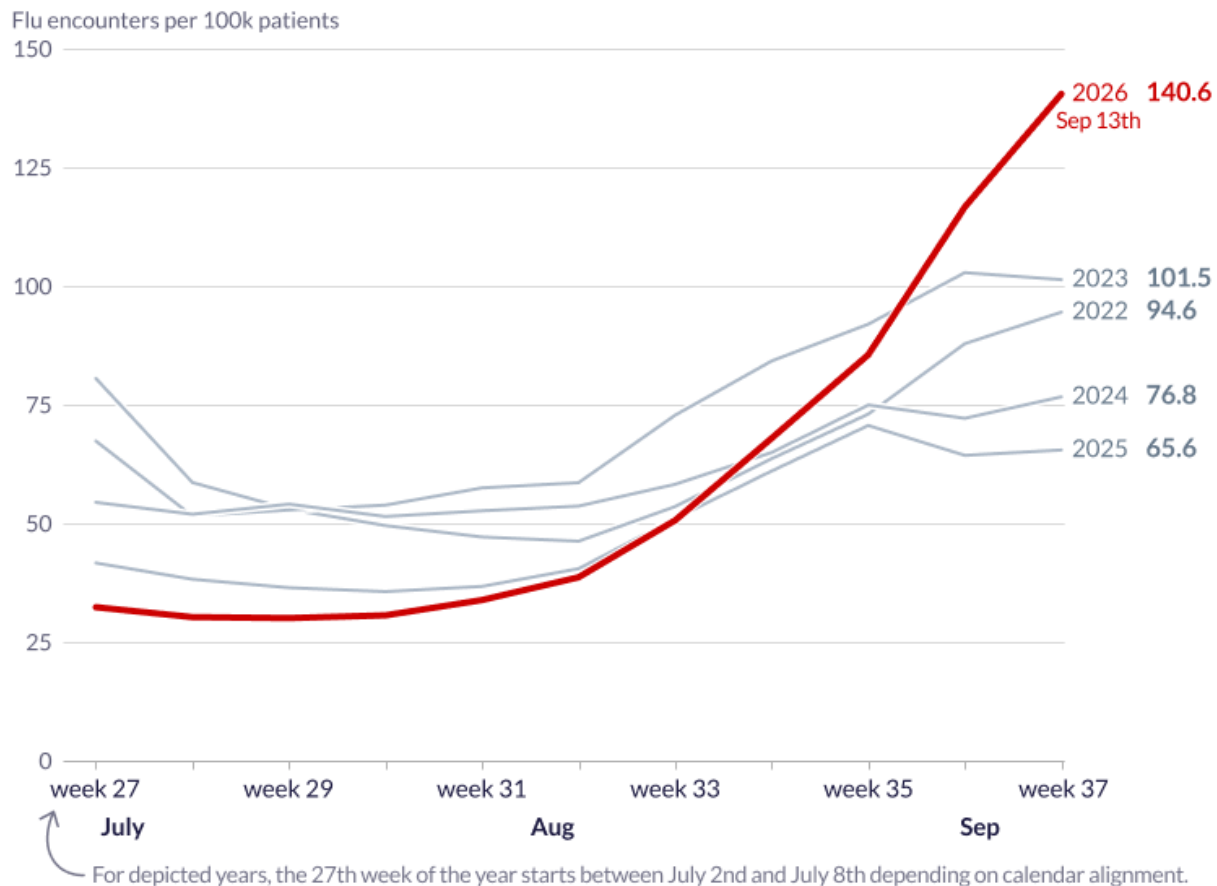
- Influenza rates are off to their earliest start in the post-pandemic era. The rate of influenza visits across office, emergency department, and inpatient settings reached 140.6 encounters per 100,000 patients the week of September 13, 2026, which is the highest mid-September level in the last five years and the earliest any of those seasons reached this rate.
- Rates are roughly double the rate of influenza visits for the same week in 2024 (76.8) and 2025 (65.6) and arrived about seven weeks ahead of those two seasons, which did not reach 140 per 100,000 until early November.
- Test positivity reached 1.5% the week of September 13, 2026, the highest mid-September rate in the post-pandemic era, exceeding the previous highs of the early starting 2022 and 2023 seasons (0.8% and 0.9%) and more than doubling the 0.6% and 0.5% positivity rates seen in the same week in 2024 and 2025.

Seasonal influenza places a substantial burden on the U.S. healthcare system each year, and the timing and intensity of flu seasons can vary considerably from one year to the next.¹ Last season's peak influenza rate was as much as 90% higher than the prior two seasons.² Tracking how early-season activity compares with prior years can offer an early read on the season ahead and inform the timing of vaccination campaigns and clinical preparedness.

Our communicable diseases data tracker follows complementary influenza measures updated every other week: the weekly rate of influenza encounters per 100,000 patients with an office, emergency department (ED), or inpatient visit, and the weekly share of influenza lab tests were positive. We studied influenza trends since 2022 to see how this season compares to other post-pandemic seasons.

September influenza rates are higher in 2026 than in any of the previous post-pandemic seasons. The week of September 13, 2026, the rate of encounters with an influenza diagnosis or positive test across all care settings reached 140.6 per 100,000 patients. In the two most recent seasons, the rate did not reach 140.6 per 100,000 until early November, roughly seven weeks later than this season. This year's rate is about double the 2024 and 2025 levels for the same week (76.8 and 65.6 per 100,000). Those two seasons were unusually quiet and started later; in 2022 and 2023, mid-September activity was already elevated at about 94.6 and 101.5 per 100,000. The rate of influenza visits this year has increased earlier than any of the preceding four seasons, as shown in Figure 1. This rise was observed consistently across outpatient, ED, and inpatient care settings when evaluated independently.

Weekly Influenza Encounter Rate per 100,000 Patients in Late Summer



"Weekly Influenza Encounter Rate per 100,000 Patients in Late Summer," 2026. EpicResearch.org

Figure 1. Weekly rate of encounters with an influenza diagnosis or positive influenza test per 100,000 patients with an office, ED, or inpatient visit in July through September, between 2022 and 2026.

Test positivity confirms that the early rise reflects an increase in influenza activity. Positivity reached 1.5% the week of September 13, 2026, the highest mid-September value in the post-pandemic era. Positivity rates for the same week in 2022 and 2023 were 0.8% and 0.9%, while the 2024 and 2025 seasons were nearly a third of this year's positivity rate at 0.6% and 0.5%. Because positivity is a share of tests performed rather than a count of visits, its rise coinciding with the increased encounter rate indicates higher influenza prevalence rather than a change in how often people are tested.

Weekly Influenza Test Positivity in Late Summer

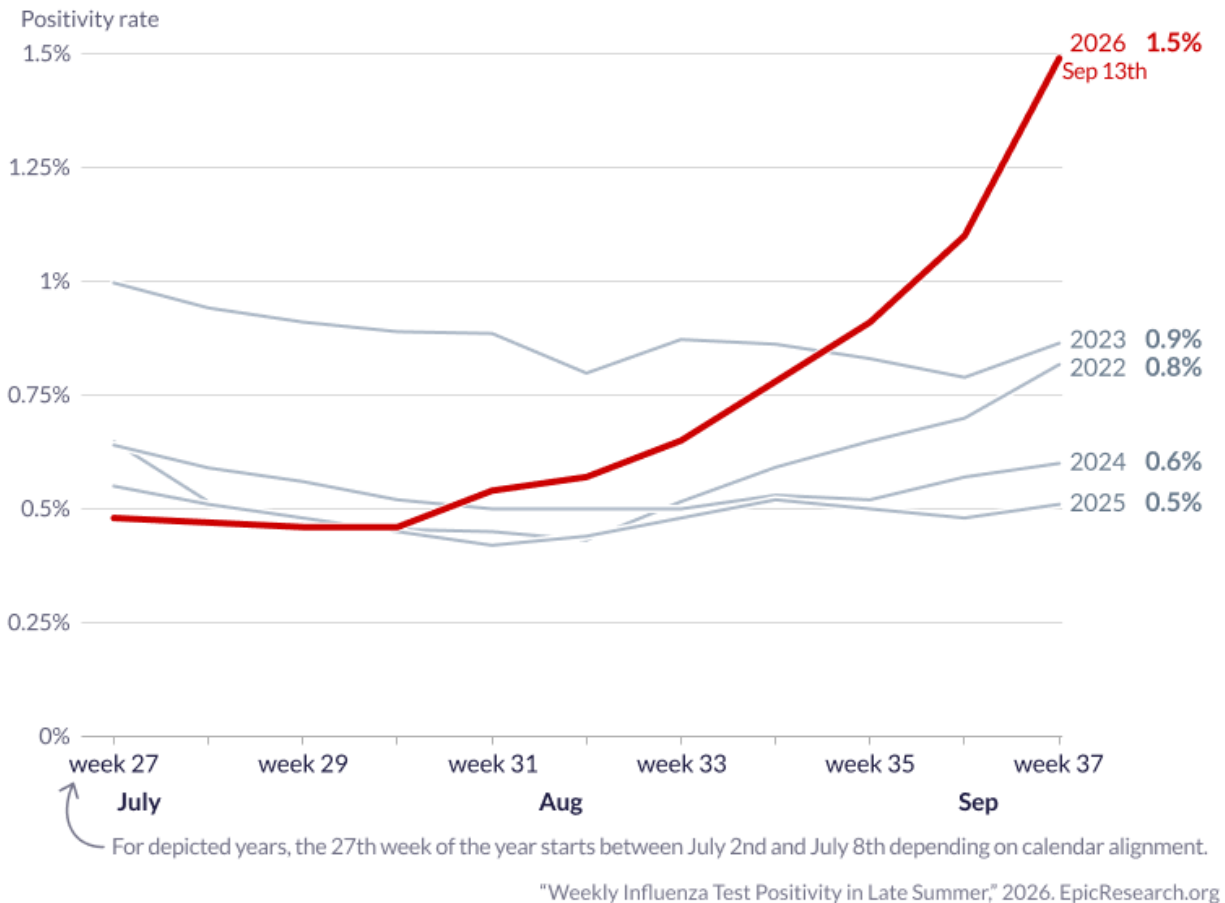


Figure 2. Weekly percentage of influenza tests with a positive result in July through September, between 2022 and 2026.

Because influenza is arriving earlier this year than in recent seasons, timely vaccination is especially relevant this fall. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends routine annual influenza vaccination for everyone aged six months and older who does not have a contraindication, ideally in September or October, with vaccination continuing throughout the season while influenza viruses are circulating.³

These data come from Cosmos, a dataset created in collaboration with a community of Epic health systems representing more than 310 million patient records from 2,200 hospitals and more than 50,000 clinics from all 50 U.S. states, Canada, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. Graphics by Brian Olson.

References

1. Hu T, Miles AC, Pond T, et al. Economic burden and secondary complications of influenza-related hospitalization among adults in the US: a retrospective cohort study. *J Med Econ.* 2024;27(1):324-336. doi:10.1080/13696998.2024.2314429

2. Epic Research. Influenza Visits Peak Higher This Season, Especially Among Children and Older Adults. Epic Research. <https://epicresearch.org/articles/influenza-visits-peak-higher-this-season-especially-among-children-and-older-adults>. Accessed October 1, 2026.
3. Interim Clinical Considerations for the Use of Seasonal Influenza Vaccines in the United States. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. September 1, 2026. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/hcp/vax-summary/seasonal-influenza-vaccines.html>. Accessed October 7, 2026.

Table 1. Weekly Influenza Encounter Rate per 100,000 Patients

Week Start Date	Influenza Rate per 100,000 Patients
1/2/2022	335.3
1/9/2022	260.2
1/16/2022	207.2
1/23/2022	164.8
1/30/2022	177.2
2/6/2022	186.3
2/13/2022	269.7
2/20/2022	326.9
2/27/2022	368.1
3/6/2022	444.8
3/13/2022	513.3
3/20/2022	482.5
3/27/2022	504.9
4/3/2022	545.6
4/10/2022	567.8
4/17/2022	497.5
4/24/2022	457.3
5/1/2022	489.4
5/8/2022	449.3
5/15/2022	389.6
5/22/2022	345.7
5/29/2022	314.5
6/5/2022	197.1
6/12/2022	148.7
6/19/2022	115.5
6/26/2022	87.6
7/3/2022	80.7
7/10/2022	58.8
7/17/2022	53.1
7/24/2022	49.7
7/31/2022	47.3
8/7/2022	46.4

8/14/2022	53.7
8/21/2022	63.8
8/28/2022	73.2
9/4/2022	88.0
9/11/2022	94.6
9/18/2022	127.0
9/25/2022	176.4
10/2/2022	262.9
10/9/2022	386.5
10/16/2022	580.5
10/23/2022	1165.1
10/30/2022	1763.3
11/6/2022	1841.2
11/13/2022	1997.3
11/20/2022	3803.3
11/27/2022	2961.7
12/4/2022	2894.2
12/11/2022	2601.9
12/18/2022	2324.3
12/25/2022	2108.6
1/1/2023	969.9
1/8/2023	472.3
1/15/2023	347.3
1/22/2023	264.1
1/29/2023	227.9
2/5/2023	201.3
2/12/2023	182.5
2/19/2023	169.5
2/26/2023	139.2
3/5/2023	127.6
3/12/2023	123.3
3/19/2023	127.7
3/26/2023	126.5
4/2/2023	113.5
4/9/2023	101.6
4/16/2023	93.6
4/23/2023	91.7
4/30/2023	97.7
5/7/2023	99.4
5/14/2023	94.4

5/21/2023	93.9
5/28/2023	101.9
6/4/2023	77.8
6/11/2023	71.7
6/18/2023	66.0
6/25/2023	61.0
7/2/2023	67.5
7/9/2023	51.7
7/16/2023	53.0
7/23/2023	54.0
7/30/2023	57.6
8/6/2023	58.7
8/13/2023	72.9
8/20/2023	84.4
8/27/2023	92.1
9/3/2023	103.0
9/10/2023	101.5
9/17/2023	114.6
9/24/2023	129.0
10/1/2023	143.7
10/8/2023	165.1
10/15/2023	195.0
10/22/2023	242.0
10/29/2023	306.2
11/5/2023	451.6
11/12/2023	550.5
11/19/2023	790.7
11/26/2023	729.3
12/3/2023	1086.9
12/10/2023	1627.7
12/17/2023	2399.0
12/24/2023	3400.7
12/31/2023	1963.0
1/7/2024	1472.4
1/14/2024	1495.1
1/21/2024	1526.4
1/28/2024	1551.3
2/4/2024	1540.1
2/11/2024	1516.6
2/18/2024	1504.4

2/25/2024	1366.5
3/3/2024	1187.1
3/10/2024	902.5
3/17/2024	701.8
3/24/2024	643.6
3/31/2024	514.9
4/7/2024	377.9
4/14/2024	271.5
4/21/2024	208.3
4/28/2024	172.4
5/5/2024	132.5
5/12/2024	114.9
5/19/2024	97.2
5/26/2024	101.7
6/2/2024	78.2
6/9/2024	69.1
6/16/2024	67.7
6/23/2024	63.3
6/30/2024	70.6
7/7/2024	54.6
7/14/2024	52.1
7/21/2024	54.2
7/28/2024	51.6
8/4/2024	52.8
8/11/2024	53.8
8/18/2024	58.4
8/25/2024	65.1
9/1/2024	75.1
9/8/2024	72.3
9/15/2024	76.8
9/22/2024	80.2
9/29/2024	82.1
10/6/2024	84.2
10/13/2024	87.6
10/20/2024	106.9
10/27/2024	125.4
11/3/2024	153.0
11/10/2024	178.0
11/17/2024	214.5
11/24/2024	354.4

12/1/2024	356.3
12/8/2024	653.9
12/15/2024	1225.4
12/22/2024	3040.9
12/29/2024	2395.4
1/5/2025	1658.6
1/12/2025	2286.0
1/19/2025	3466.8
1/26/2025	4026.9
2/2/2025	4118.3
2/9/2025	3251.7
2/16/2025	2535.8
2/23/2025	1846.0
3/2/2025	1464.2
3/9/2025	1157.2
3/16/2025	842.3
3/23/2025	658.5
3/30/2025	505.1
4/6/2025	366.3
4/13/2025	314.0
4/20/2025	253.4
4/27/2025	186.6
5/4/2025	155.6
5/11/2025	136.8
5/18/2025	120.4
5/25/2025	125.0
6/1/2025	90.2
6/8/2025	71.7
6/15/2025	61.5
6/22/2025	57.7
6/29/2025	53.1
7/6/2025	41.8
7/13/2025	38.4
7/20/2025	36.6
7/27/2025	35.8
8/3/2025	36.9
8/10/2025	40.6
8/17/2025	51.2
8/24/2025	61.2
8/31/2025	70.8

9/7/2025	64.5
9/14/2025	65.6
9/21/2025	71.3
9/28/2025	78.9
10/5/2025	84.1
10/12/2025	91.4
10/19/2025	104.7
10/26/2025	128.7
11/2/2025	204.2
11/9/2025	282.9
11/16/2025	441.2
11/23/2025	733.8
11/30/2025	666.6
12/7/2025	1247.7
12/14/2025	2457.5
12/21/2025	5181.4
12/28/2025	3538.1
1/4/2026	1705.8
1/11/2026	1359.6
1/18/2026	1563.1
1/25/2026	1464.0
2/1/2026	1430.8
2/8/2026	1614.0
2/15/2026	1626.7
2/22/2026	1298.9
3/1/2026	1245.2
3/8/2026	983.8
3/15/2026	753.2
3/22/2026	634.6
3/29/2026	499.6
4/5/2026	328.7
4/12/2026	235.9
4/19/2026	170.9
4/26/2026	141.9
5/3/2026	125.4
5/10/2026	105.3
5/17/2026	88.5
5/24/2026	80.4
5/31/2026	58.1
6/7/2026	46.7

6/14/2026	42.7
6/21/2026	38.1
6/28/2026	38.7
7/5/2026	32.5
7/12/2026	30.4
7/19/2026	30.2
7/26/2026	30.8
8/2/2026	34.0
8/9/2026	38.8
8/16/2026	50.8
8/23/2026	68.1
8/30/2026	85.7
9/6/2026	116.8
9/13/2026	140.6

Table 2. Weekly Influenza Test Positivity

Week Start Date	Influenza Test Positivity (%)
1/2/2022	1.59
1/9/2022	1.44
1/16/2022	1.32
1/23/2022	1.35
1/30/2022	1.73
2/6/2022	2.15
2/13/2022	3.08
2/20/2022	3.59
2/27/2022	4.27
3/6/2022	4.95
3/13/2022	5.49
3/20/2022	5.03
3/27/2022	5.12
4/3/2022	5.67
4/10/2022	5.64
4/17/2022	4.91
4/24/2022	4.46
5/1/2022	4.52
5/8/2022	3.94
5/15/2022	3.33
5/22/2022	2.92
5/29/2022	2.43
6/5/2022	1.80

6/12/2022	1.39
6/19/2022	1.05
6/26/2022	0.81
7/3/2022	0.65
7/10/2022	0.52
7/17/2022	0.47
7/24/2022	0.46
7/31/2022	0.45
8/7/2022	0.43
8/14/2022	0.52
8/21/2022	0.59
8/28/2022	0.65
9/4/2022	0.70
9/11/2022	0.82
9/18/2022	1.03
9/25/2022	1.41
10/2/2022	2.00
10/9/2022	2.82
10/16/2022	3.94
10/23/2022	6.76
10/30/2022	9.06
11/6/2022	9.41
11/13/2022	10.38
11/20/2022	14.31
11/27/2022	13.28
12/4/2022	13.18
12/11/2022	12.02
12/18/2022	10.33
12/25/2022	7.71
1/1/2023	4.72
1/8/2023	2.84
1/15/2023	2.03
1/22/2023	1.56
1/29/2023	1.35
2/5/2023	1.23
2/12/2023	1.12
2/19/2023	1.05
2/26/2023	0.95
3/5/2023	0.91
3/12/2023	0.91

3/19/2023	0.98
3/26/2023	1.02
4/2/2023	0.97
4/9/2023	0.91
4/16/2023	0.90
4/23/2023	0.94
4/30/2023	1.03
5/7/2023	1.13
5/14/2023	1.15
5/21/2023	1.18
5/28/2023	1.21
6/4/2023	1.13
6/11/2023	1.08
6/18/2023	1.04
6/25/2023	1.06
7/2/2023	1.00
7/9/2023	0.94
7/16/2023	0.91
7/23/2023	0.89
7/30/2023	0.89
8/6/2023	0.80
8/13/2023	0.87
8/20/2023	0.86
8/27/2023	0.83
9/3/2023	0.79
9/10/2023	0.86
9/17/2023	0.95
9/24/2023	1.09
10/1/2023	1.22
10/8/2023	1.40
10/15/2023	1.62
10/22/2023	1.96
10/29/2023	2.38
11/5/2023	3.21
11/12/2023	3.77
11/19/2023	4.27
11/26/2023	4.52
12/3/2023	6.42
12/10/2023	8.59
12/17/2023	10.71

12/24/2023	10.84
12/31/2023	8.37
1/7/2024	8.16
1/14/2024	8.58
1/21/2024	9.33
1/28/2024	9.25
2/4/2024	8.97
2/11/2024	8.88
2/18/2024	8.96
2/25/2024	8.78
3/3/2024	8.24
3/10/2024	6.66
3/17/2024	5.54
3/24/2024	5.23
3/31/2024	4.36
4/7/2024	3.42
4/14/2024	2.69
4/21/2024	2.16
4/28/2024	1.83
5/5/2024	1.40
5/12/2024	1.20
5/19/2024	1.06
5/26/2024	1.05
6/2/2024	0.96
6/9/2024	0.88
6/16/2024	0.86
6/23/2024	0.83
6/30/2024	0.75
7/7/2024	0.64
7/14/2024	0.59
7/21/2024	0.56
7/28/2024	0.52
8/4/2024	0.50
8/11/2024	0.50
8/18/2024	0.50
8/25/2024	0.53
9/1/2024	0.52
9/8/2024	0.57
9/15/2024	0.60
9/22/2024	0.65

9/29/2024	0.67
10/6/2024	0.68
10/13/2024	0.68
10/20/2024	0.85
10/27/2024	1.02
11/3/2024	1.26
11/10/2024	1.44
11/17/2024	1.68
11/24/2024	2.25
12/1/2024	2.64
12/8/2024	4.68
12/15/2024	7.67
12/22/2024	10.52
12/29/2024	9.60
1/5/2025	9.59
1/12/2025	12.74
1/19/2025	15.86
1/26/2025	17.13
2/2/2025	16.71
2/9/2025	14.29
2/16/2025	12.05
2/23/2025	10.12
3/2/2025	8.56
3/9/2025	7.29
3/16/2025	5.80
3/23/2025	4.87
3/30/2025	3.98
4/6/2025	3.08
4/13/2025	2.74
4/20/2025	2.29
4/27/2025	1.79
5/4/2025	1.54
5/11/2025	1.34
5/18/2025	1.26
5/25/2025	1.17
6/1/2025	1.02
6/8/2025	0.87
6/15/2025	0.74
6/22/2025	0.73
6/29/2025	0.64

7/6/2025	0.55
7/13/2025	0.51
7/20/2025	0.48
7/27/2025	0.45
8/3/2025	0.42
8/10/2025	0.44
8/17/2025	0.48
8/24/2025	0.52
8/31/2025	0.50
9/7/2025	0.48
9/14/2025	0.51
9/21/2025	0.59
9/28/2025	0.67
10/5/2025	0.75
10/12/2025	0.83
10/19/2025	0.97
10/26/2025	1.19
11/2/2025	1.81
11/9/2025	2.49
11/16/2025	3.82
11/23/2025	4.88
11/30/2025	5.20
12/7/2025	8.72
12/14/2025	13.62
12/21/2025	16.15
12/28/2025	12.18
1/4/2026	9.15
1/11/2026	8.26
1/18/2026	9.04
1/25/2026	8.93
2/1/2026	8.97
2/8/2026	9.64
2/15/2026	9.25
2/22/2026	7.90
3/1/2026	8.18
3/8/2026	7.00
3/15/2026	5.62
3/22/2026	5.13
3/29/2026	4.18
4/5/2026	2.96

4/12/2026	2.29
4/19/2026	1.70
4/26/2026	1.44
5/3/2026	1.27
5/10/2026	1.08
5/17/2026	0.96
5/24/2026	0.78
5/31/2026	0.70
6/7/2026	0.60
6/14/2026	0.55
6/21/2026	0.52
6/28/2026	0.52
7/5/2026	0.48
7/12/2026	0.47
7/19/2026	0.46
7/26/2026	0.46
8/2/2026	0.54
8/9/2026	0.57
8/16/2026	0.65
8/23/2026	0.78
8/30/2026	0.91
9/6/2026	1.10
9/13/2026	1.49