



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Health

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Dear Colleague:

Virginia has reported its first laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza for the 2012-2013 flu season. Although flu activity is local at present, it is never too early or too late to think about influenza prevention. Please consider the actions below to help mitigate the effects of influenza this season.

Vaccination

I encourage you to get your annual influenza vaccine this year and to promote annual flu vaccination for your staff and your patients. The A/H3N2 and B vaccine virus components in the 2012-2013 vaccine are new. Vaccine viruses undergo a vigorous selection process in order to maximize the likelihood that the influenza vaccine will provide protection against the viruses most likely to spread and cause illness among people during each flu season. Influenza vaccination remains the best tool we have to prevent influenza.

As you know, annual influenza vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months of age or older. The influenza vaccine is especially important for those with chronic medical conditions, health care workers, and caregivers of infants under 6 months of age. Pregnant women should receive an annual flu vaccine during pregnancy to protect themselves and their babies. For more detailed information on influenza vaccine dosing and administration, go to www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/.

Clinical Guidance on Rapid Influenza Diagnostic Tests (RIDTs)

On November 2, 2012, an evaluation of several rapid influenza diagnostic tests was published in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, available [online](#). There are many rapid diagnostic tools available to assist providers in clinical decision making about influenza in the office. Due to the limited sensitivities and predictive values of RIDTs, however, it is important to remember that negative results of RIDTs do not exclude influenza virus infection in patients with signs and symptoms suggestive of influenza.

Virginia Immunization Information System (VIIS)

Due to the efforts of both public and private providers, the Virginia Immunization Information System (VIIS) has recorded close to 500,000 influenza vaccinations administered in Virginia so far this season. However, since not all vaccine providers are using VIIS, this measure underestimates actual doses of vaccine administration. The busy flu vaccine season serves as a good reminder of the value of this information system.

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Please consider registering in VIIS, if you are not already a participating provider. In addition to helping to provide a better estimate of vaccination levels in Virginia, VIIS provides additional benefits to clinicians, such as:

- The ability to consolidate your patient's immunizations into one record from both the public and private sector
- A reminder/recall feature to keep patients on track for receiving timely immunizations
- An inventory management system
- Official immunization records for school entrance
- Validation of immunization history with recommendations based on the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) tracking schedule

Surveillance

I also ask that you stay abreast of influenza trends in Virginia so that you can adapt your clinical practice as flu incidence increases in your communities. VDH tracks influenza and influenza-like illnesses (ILI) and provides a weekly update online, <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/Surveillance/Influenza>. The website also includes reporting from the Influenza Incidence Surveillance Project (IISP), which is in its third year. The project involves testing a sample of patients who present with ILI to six participating providers around the state. Specimens are tested for a panel of respiratory pathogens including influenza to better describe all of the viruses currently circulating in the community. One of the easiest ways to be sure you have the latest information is to sign up for the VDH listserv which provides monthly updates and more urgent information as needed. You can sign up for email updates at www.vdh.virginia.gov/clinicians/index.htm.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to your patients' and the public's health. Through our collective efforts we will minimize the toll influenza takes on Virginians over the upcoming months.

Sincerely,

Maureen E. Dempsey, MD, FAAP
Acting State Health Commissioner

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