



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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State Health Commissioner

Department of Health
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Dear Colleague:

My last communication shared with you information about the use of the Virginia Immunization Information System (VIIS) and the ability to pre-register to be an H1N1 vaccinator. Demonstrating once again your leadership and desire to be part of Virginia's response, over 1600 vaccinators throughout Virginia have expressed a willingness to participate. Thank you. Our vaccination campaign is dependent on your engagement and each of you has demonstrated to the Commonwealth and the Governor the strength and commitment of our clinical community in meeting this challenge.

I also want to encourage everyone to think broadly when supporting seasonal flu and novel H1N1 vaccination. For instance, did you know that we have around 80,000 pregnant women in Virginia each year, but only 17% of this high-risk group receive flu vaccine? Our obstetricians, family practitioners and pediatricians are working to be sure their patients and mothers receive vaccine, but by including opportunities and education about the importance of flu vaccination in such pregnancy-related activities as Lamaze classes, retail outlets catering to maternity needs, pediatric offices, etc. we should be able to further improve our protection of these women. I ask you to work with your hospitals to encourage this outreach.

At this time, the Virginia Department of Health is anticipating the release of novel H1N1 vaccine in mid-October. We believe that the vaccine supply will be more than adequate to meet demand, although we will be obliged to focus first on specific groups identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These groups include all those age 6 months to 24 years of age, all pregnant women, healthcare workers (including emergency medical personnel), all those who live with or care for a child less than 6 months of age, and those between the ages of 25 and 64 with high-risk underlying medical conditions. These groups may be further restricted initially based on vaccine availability. Vaccine will be released in weekly allotments and, as I mentioned, is anticipated to be fully adequate to meet demand of the general population as the weeks progress.

Seasonal influenza vaccine is now available and early immunization is encouraged. Please note that the H1N1 component in the seasonal flu vaccine does NOT protect against novel H1N1 virus.

I also want to encourage those of you who immunize patients to participate in the VIIS registry if you are not yet doing so. VIIS is a wonderful tool for you and your patients. Participants enter basic data about immunizations they administer and have access to the immunizations administered to their patients by other VIIS participants. VIIS participation decreases the likelihood of giving redundant immunizations and increases the accuracy of immunization histories. At present, over two million records exist in the registry. VIIS is easy for staff to use and feedback has been positive. If you would like to be a VIIS participant or if you have questions about VIIS, please contact Reena Patel at (804) 864-8073 or Reena.Patel@vdh.virginia.gov. For more information, visit our online user site at www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/immunization/viis/viistraining.htm.

The global public health and medical communities continue to learn more about the novel H1N1 virus. A recent MMWR article (www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5832a3.htm) describes the prolonged viral shedding that can occur in those patients with impaired immune systems and the need to monitor them for the *de novo* development of antiviral resistance.

Thank you for all you do every day to keep Virginians healthy and for your responsiveness to the needs created by this new virus. Please check out the information on our website (www.vdh.virginia.gov) posted under "H1N1 flu" or contact your local health director for information about local novel H1N1 vaccination activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen Remley". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP
State Health Commissioner