



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

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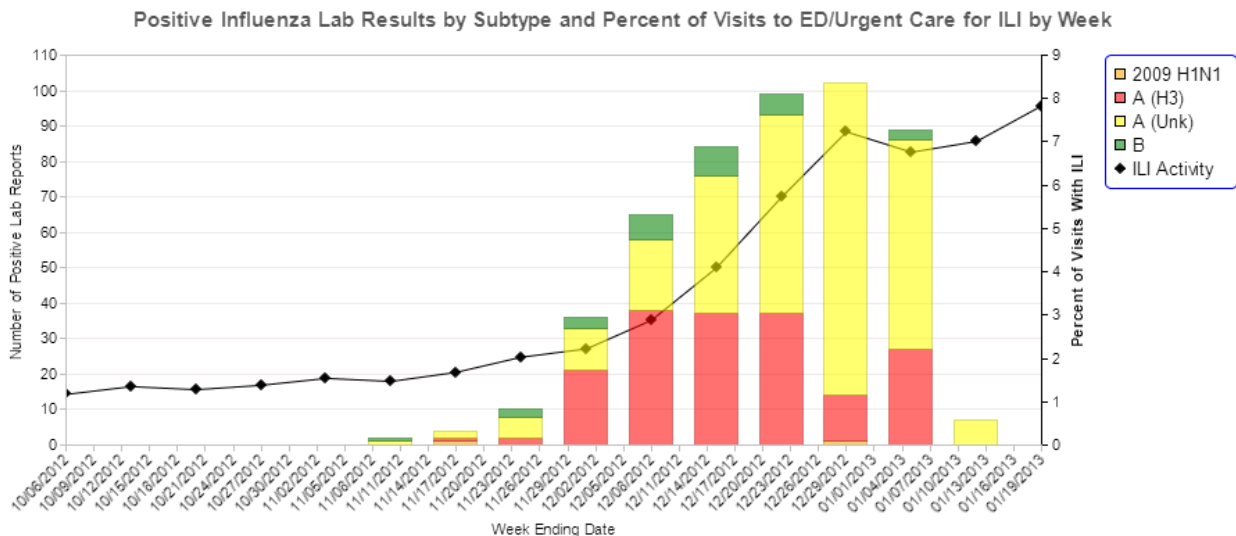
January 15, 2013

Dear Colleague,

In recent weeks, you and your patients have likely seen reports regarding the widespread status of influenza and media coverage of availability of vaccine and oseltamivir. Given the prevalence of influenza in the Commonwealth at this time, I wanted to be sure you had the latest Virginia specific information to aid your clinical decision making.

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has been reporting widespread influenza activity since mid-December, with an abrupt and early start to this year's flu season. We have received and responded to reports of outbreaks in all regions of the state, including reports from schools, assisted living facilities and nursing homes. While the surge in activity began in southwest Virginia, it has since spread to the remaining areas of the state. Influenza A/H3N2 is the predominant virus that is being laboratory confirmed.

While it's too early to say what the rest of the season will bring, the early and active start to the season emphasizes the importance of prevention and prompt anti-viral treatment. Once the initial surge in illness activity passes, the influenza virus will continue to circulate in our communities for several weeks.



As you may know, VDH tracks influenza and influenza-like illnesses (ILI) and provides a weekly update [online](#). We do not count individual cases of influenza but instead follow trends in visits to emergency rooms, laboratory data and reports of outbreaks.

On January 11, 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released early vaccine effectiveness data in the [MMWR](#). The estimate for this year's vaccine efficacy is 62 percent, which is similar to previous years. While not perfect, the vaccine remains the best preventive measure against the flu.

There are still important steps you can take to protect your patients, your staff, and yourself.

- Continue to encourage your patients and your staff to get vaccinated. Vaccine remains available in Virginia. Although some providers may have already exhausted their supply, many still have flu vaccine on hand. If you no longer have vaccine available, please consider using the flu locator tool available on the VDH [website](#), refer patients to another source or call your local health department – and let your patients know to do the same.
- Prompt antiviral treatment is recommended for any patient diagnosed with influenza who is hospitalized; has severe, complicated, or progressive illness; or is at higher risk for influenza complications. Despite sporadic antiviral spot shortages, there is no national shortage of antiviral medications at this time. Additional guidance on the use of influenza antiviral medications is available on the CDC [website](#).
- Remind your patients to wash their hands, cover their coughs and stay home when sick.
- If your facility is experiencing an outbreak of influenza, please report this to the local health department that covers your city or county in which your facility is located. The health department can assist you with recommendations and control measures to limit the impact of the outbreak.

I will continue to provide information on our website and provide periodic flu updates as needed. We encourage you to register for the VDH listserv that provides monthly public health information for clinicians including more detailed influenza information. Please visit, <https://vms.vdh.virginia.gov/vdhcomm/index.jsp>, to subscribe and receive these updates.

Thank you for your continued partnership in protecting the health of Virginians.

Thank you,

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