



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Ryan White Clinical Providers

Subject: Mobilizing HIV Clinicians to Vaccinate Vulnerable Virginians

Dear Colleagues:

People with HIV (PWH) in Virginia will benefit from several vaccines that prevent serious illnesses to which they may be particularly vulnerable. It is especially important to increase our efforts to encourage our patients to receive vaccines for [meningococcal disease](#), [Mpox](#), [influenza](#), and [COVID-19](#).

Meningococcal disease is a rare and severe bacterial illness and PWH are at increased risk for this disease, particularly when infected with *Neisseria meningitidis* serogroups C, W, or Y. Having a low CD4 count, or a high HIV viral load, further increases a person's risk. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommend that PWH receive the MenACWY vaccine, including booster doses, every five years throughout life.

Mpox is caused by an orthopoxvirus. In the United States, the virus has been identified mainly in gay, bisexual, or other men who have sex with men, and individuals who have multiple or anonymous sex partners. People who are immunocompromised are at greater risk of experiencing serious illness. As of August 14, 2023, Virginia had 574 reported cases, with the Northern and Eastern regions more heavily affected, with 276 and 163 cases, respectively.

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness that can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. PWH are at higher risk of developing serious flu-related complications, especially those who have a very low CD4 cell count or those who are not taking medicine to treat HIV. The best way to prevent flu is by getting a flu shot. Similarly, having HIV can make you more likely to get very sick from COVID-19. CDC recommends that PWH, regardless of CD4 count or viral load, remain up to date for the COVID-19 vaccine because the potential benefits outweigh potential risks.

Currently, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) Advisory Committee request that providers:

- **Educate and encourage your patients with HIV to receive routine administration of the MenACWY vaccine to prevent meningococcal disease.**
 - **For uninsured patients**, this vaccine is available through the Virginia Medication Assistance Program (VA MAP). VA MAP can reimburse local health departments for this vaccine if the PWH meets the requirements of being uninsured and enrolled in the Virginia Ryan White Part B program. *Insured patients should use their insurance to access this vaccine. If their insurance does not cover this vaccine, they can access it at a local health department or [Virginia Vaccines for Adult \(VVFA\) Provider](#).*

- **Educate and encourage your patients with HIV to receive both doses of the safe and effective JYNNEOS [mpox vaccine](#).**
 - **To vaccinate, prescribers must review the [Health and Human Services \(HHS\) Provider Agreement](#) and email mpxquestions@vdh.virginia.gov with intent to administer. For complete instructions, refer to the [VDH Vaccine Guidance for Healthcare Providers](#). Providers may also refer their patients to the [Mpox Vaccine Locator](#).**
 - VDH is partnering with different agencies to make the vaccine available in additional sites beyond the local health departments.

- **Everyone aged six months and older should get an annual flu vaccine every year.**
 - People with HIV should get an influenza shot (not the nasal spray influenza vaccine) every year. Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine [LAIV] (nasal spray) vaccine should not be used in people with HIV and AIDS because LAIV contains a weakened form of the live flu virus and is not recommended for use in people with immunosuppression.

- **Everyone aged six months and older is recommended to get at least one updated Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.**
 - Children aged five years and younger may need more than one dose.
 - People who are aged 65 years and older and those who are moderately or severely immunocompromised may get an additional dose(s) of an updated COVID-19 vaccine.
 - Visit [CDC's website](#) for more information on staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccines.
 - For people with untreated or advanced HIV, the National Institute of Health COVID-19 Treatment Guidelines Panel recommends following the most recent [COVID-19 vaccination schedule](#) from the CDC for people who are moderately or severely immunocompromised.

The VDH and the ADAP Advisory Committee thank you for your continued commitment to providing quality and person-centered clinical care to PWH. Your efforts ensure improved

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health outcomes for vulnerable populations, provide access to equitable healthcare, and help make Virginia a healthier state for its residents.

Please take a moment to review the information in this letter. I hope you will respond affirmatively to this call to action for the benefit of your patients living with HIV in the Commonwealth. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Jasmine Ford, HCS Clinical Coordinator at (804) 864-8224 or by email at jasmine.ford@vdh.virginia.gov address.

Sincerely,



Laurie Forlano, DO, MPH
Director, Office of Epidemiology
State Epidemiologist



Kathleen A. McManus, MD MSCR
Chair, Virginia ADAP Advisory Committee

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