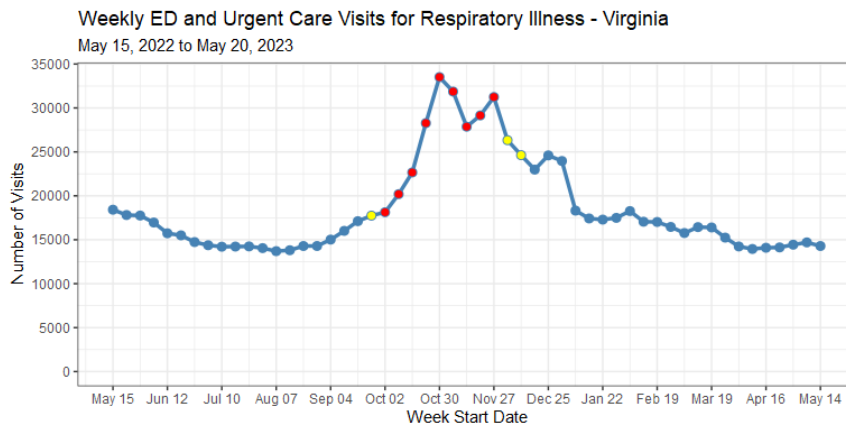


May 26, 2023

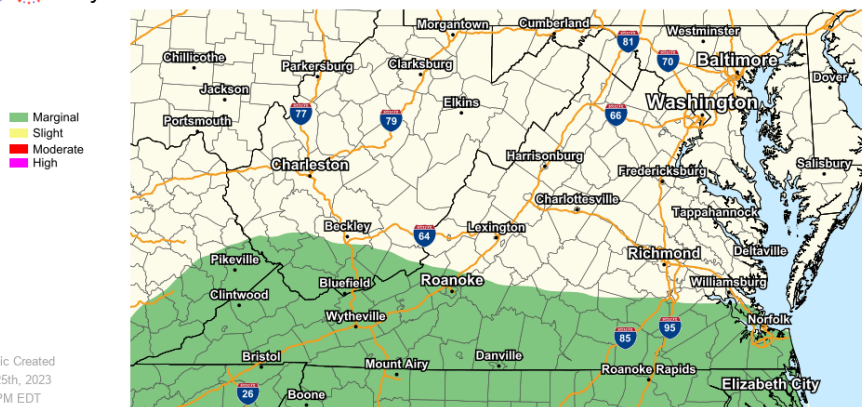
Key Takeaways

- Case rates of COVID-19 and influenza are at a seasonal low. COVID-19 hospitalization rates are the lowest recorded since summer of 2021. Other surveillance metrics such as wastewater sampling, and COVID-like illness visits to emergency departments and urgent care facilities, corroborate these findings. Models suggest that Virginia will see a mild summer of low COVID-19 activity.
- Tick-borne diseases continue to cause significant morbidity in the Commonwealth. As "tick season" begins, Virginians are urged to practice good tick-bite prevention.
- Avian influenza is still causing outbreaks among livestock. It has not yet caused any significant human morbidity. The USDA is considering a vaccination program that would include turkeys in Virginia.
- NOAA predicts a warmer and wetter summer for parts of Virginia. It also expects a "near normal" hurricane season.

Key Figures



Day Three Excessive Rainfall Outlook



Graphic Created
 May 25th, 2023
 8:36 PM EDT

Source: National Weather Service

COVID-19

15%

Chance that the WHO will identify a new COVID-19 Variant of Concern before 2024. (Metaculus forecast)

0.6%

Chance that the peak 7-day average of COVID-19 cases in Summer 2023 will exceed last winter's. (Metaculus forecast)

113 / 34

New COVID-19 / flu hospital admissions in Virginia for the week ending May 21.

Mpox

4.3

Metaculus forecast of the number of mpox cases Virginia will experience in Q2, 2023

Hurricane Season

12-17

Expected Named Storms

5-9

Expected Hurricanes

1-4

Expected Major Hurricanes

Spotlights:

Respiratory Diseases

Tick-Borne Diseases

Forecasts are italicized

Spotlights

Respiratory Disease Outlook

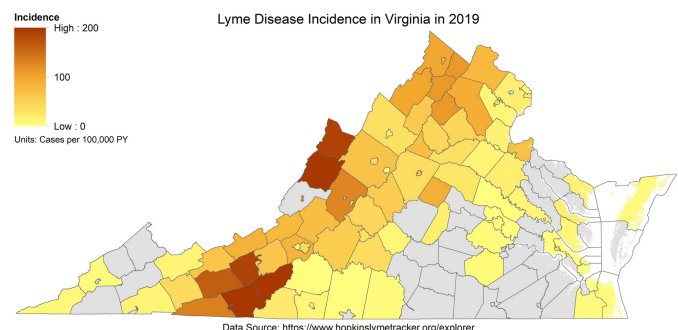
- **COVID-19 rates at record lows.** Surveillance suggests that Virginia is nearing historically low rates of COVID-19. Last week's confirmed cases were lower than that of any week since summer of 2021. [COVID-like illness](#) reported to urgent care facilities and emergency departments are down about 50% since February. Growth trajectories show that most health districts have plateaued at a low level. [Wastewater surveillance](#) also shows plateaus or decreases at all surveyed sites, with a dozen reporting viral loads below detection thresholds.
- **Respiratory illness hospitalizations remain muted.** Last week the Commonwealth recorded 113 COVID-19 hospitalizations, and 34 influenza hospitalizations. This represents the fewest new COVID-19 hospitalizations since the summer of 2021 and a near season low for the flu. Adults over age 70 continue to comprise most new hospitalizations. Last week Virginia saw a slight uptick in pediatric hospitalizations for those under five, but this rate is no higher than it was in late March.
- **Forecasts suggest a mild summer for respiratory illness.** Modeling efforts suggest that hospitalizations will continue to remain low in Virginia for the coming months. This is to be expected, as hospitalizations are in decline in most of [the European nations](#) which typically lead the U.S. in COVID-19 surges. Though new variants like XBB.2.3 seem to have some [growth advantages](#), they have not yet caused a surge in any peer nation. Rates for Influenza B (flu), Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), and Human Metapneumovirus (hMPV) have [all fallen significantly](#) in recent months. Barring some unforeseen circumstances, a fair summer is expected.

Other News

- **Avian influenza remains a concern.** For months, officials have kept an eye on the [H5N1 avian flu](#) as it sickened livestock and wildlife. The possibility of spillover followed by sustained transmission within the human population remains low, but countermeasures are being taken regardless. Brazil is the most recent casualty of this global outbreak. The nation declared a state of emergency after detecting the [flu in chickens](#). A man in his 60s is also being [held in isolation](#) pending further tests. He is suspected of having contracted the virus. The USDA is considering a [mass immunization](#) strategy to [inoculate turkeys](#) against the disease. Vaccines specific to the circulating virus (H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b) are [in trials now](#).
- **Hurricane outlook "near normal".** The NOAA Climate Prediction Center has released their [hurricane season outlook](#) for the coming season. Though the Atlantic Ocean is expected to be warmer than normal, NOAA forecasts a "near normal" season, with an estimated 12-17 named storms. Of those, 5-9 could become hurricanes, including 1-4 major hurricanes. Colorado State University climatologists [predicted a slightly milder season](#), with 13 named storms and two hurricanes.
- **NOAA forecasts a hotter and wetter summer for Virginia.** The [recent seasonal outlook](#) for the coming summer suggests Virginia may see well above normal temperatures. Northern Virginia and parts of western Virginia may also see increased rainfall. Climatologists expect a return to El Niño conditions, suggesting [record highs](#) could be reached around the world this summer. This may drive up flooding and extreme heat events in Virginia.

Tick-Borne Diseases in Virginia

- **Lyme disease continues to seriously impact Virginia.** May is [Lyme disease awareness month](#). As we enter "[tick season](#)", Virginians should keep their guard up. Lyme is the most significant vector-borne disease in the United States and affects an estimated [474,000 people per year](#). Lyme can be found around the Commonwealth, but particularly affects Northern Virginia and the Blue Ridge Mountains along Interstate 81.
- **Powassan virus remains elusive but deadly.** The [Powassan virus](#) is a newly emerging tick-borne pathogen in the Flaviviridae family. Spread by *Ixodes* species (deer ticks) and *Dermacentor* species (dog ticks), Powassan virus made national news by [causing a recent death](#) in Maine. Though the virus [has been detected](#) in ticks in Virginia by academic labs, it is still quite rare.
- **Guidelines to protect against tick-borne diseases.** Simple precautions can greatly reduce the likelihood of developing a tick-borne illness. VDH offers a guide to [proper tick prevention here](#). Additionally, the CDC offers [landscaping tips](#) to minimize ticks around the home.



Lyme disease is most common in the Blue Ridge Mountains, New River Valley, and in Northern Virginia. Data from [Johns Hopkins Univ.](#)