



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Department of Health

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Dear Colleague:

I'm writing to update you on the novel influenza A (novel H1N1) virus's impact on fall influenza immunization activities. This letter provides important information on your role in protecting the public from seasonal influenza and preventing the further spread of novel H1N1, including asking you to join in our novel H1N1 vaccination campaign.

The novel H1N1 virus presents unique challenges. It is infecting Virginians long after the end of our typical flu season. Based on CDC estimates of novel H1N1 cases nationwide, Virginia has most likely already had over 20,000. The virus is expected to linger into the fall and co-circulate with seasonal influenza viruses. The age distribution of novel H1N1 cases is unlike that seen with seasonal flu with more children and fewer elderly affected. Influenza strains circulating this fall are likely to be susceptible to different antiviral drugs than what we are currently recommending for certain novel H1N1 infections. To help prepare for this trend, I have formed the Primary Care Novel H1N1 Advisory Group, whose members are listed below.

So I ask you to promote early, vigorous and sustained efforts to educate and vaccinate patients and healthcare workers about and against seasonal influenza. This will diminish the impact of seasonal influenza, assure resources (such as staff) are available to care for novel H1N1 patients and for administration of novel H1N1 vaccine later, and minimize diagnostic and treatment challenges as multiple flu strains circulate. This is an opportunity to review how you and your staff educate patients about influenza, how you promote seasonal flu vaccination, and to begin these discussions with your patients.

Later this fall, the CDC expects a novel H1N1 vaccine to become available after clinical trials are conducted by the NIH. Pending FDA approval, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices is developing recommendations about priority groups. While many worry about this being a "new vaccine" the process used to develop the vaccine is the same as is used every year for seasonal influenza vaccine. It is fully anticipated that priority groups will include healthcare workers, children six months to 18 years, and individuals with medical conditions. For more information go to www.flu.gov/vaccine/index.html.

Many of you see the priority groups in your offices, clinics and emergency department. Knowing that there will be a need to offer vaccination to large groups of the population rapidly and that many would like to receive their immunization at their medical home, I encourage you to become part of our novel H1N1 vaccination efforts. In order to offer this vaccine to Virginians it will require strong partnerships between local health departments, private providers, clinics, occupational health, pharmacies, grocery stores, school systems, and hospitals – I ask you to be part of this team.

At this time the federal government plans to purchase and ship vaccine and ancillary supplies (needles, syringes, sharps containers and alcohol swabs) at no cost to vaccine providers. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will authorize immunizers and direct shipments of all novel H1N1 vaccine. Vaccine will be free for patients; however, an administration fee may be allowed for insured patients.

In the interest of helping to get you and your office prepared, VDH is developing a pre-registration process for all licensed immunization providers interested in administering novel H1N1 vaccine. Those who pre-register are not committed to administering vaccine. We anticipate finalizing this pre-registration process within the next few weeks and will send you this information as soon as it's available.

Weekly reporting of vaccine doses administered is a CDC requirement and must be submitted via the Virginia Immunization Information System (VIIS), the state's immunization registry. Once final details of the vaccination program have been released, pre-registered providers will be asked to complete an agreement and to submit a vaccine order. The agreement will outline the terms and conditions of vaccine use and accountability. Novel H1N1 vaccine will only be released to vaccine administrators approved by VDH who complete and submit an agreement and vaccine order.

VDH will provide updates about this very important campaign as information is available. Please visit our website (www.vdh.virginia.gov) for updates. You may also arrange to receive e-mailed CDC updates by visiting <http://emergency.cdc.gov/eoca/callinfo.asp>.

In conclusion, this fall promises to be a very challenging influenza season with both seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu vaccination campaigns and potentially concomitant illness. Please help minimize the impact on all Virginians by educating your community and patients about the importance of immunization, participating in our vaccination campaign and protecting yourself by getting your seasonal influenza vaccine early.

Sincerely,



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State Health Commissioner

State Health Commissioner's Primary Care H1N1 Advisory Group

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