



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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State Health Commissioner

*Department of Health*  
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Dear Local Official,

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) would like to thank you and your staff for your continued efforts to address the challenges created by the novel influenza H1N1 virus.

VDH knows that you have worked hard over the years to have robust emergency plans in place, with an emphasis on the “all hazards” approach and are now faced with the specific risks imposed by this new flu virus, which brings with it the likelihood of illness in your communities, episodic increased absenteeism, and potential social disruption. VDH encourages you to review and further develop your emergency plans for continuity of operations and to address the possibility of a periodically depleted workforce as we head into the upcoming flu season.

To reduce absenteeism and minimize any disruptions in government services, VDH encourages all government employees to get their seasonal flu vaccine now and the novel H1N1 vaccine when it is ready later this fall; anticipated availability of the novel H1N1 vaccine is in mid-October. Although the initial focus for immunization against novel H1N1 flu will be on vaccinating specific groups (including pregnant women, children and adults age 6 months to 24 years of age, people who live with or care for infants under the age of 6 months, healthcare workers, and adults ages 25 to 64 with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, immunosuppression and heart disease), we expect to have sufficient vaccine to immunize all those wishing to protect themselves from the novel H1N1 flu.

You may find it helpful to review the federal Centers for Disease Control & Prevention’s (“the CDC”) new vaccination guidance specifically created for local governments at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/statelocal/>.

Some of the recommended responses for local governments include:

- Promote infection control measures at all work sites. Encourage employees to frequently wash their hands and to cover coughs and sneezes with a sleeve, elbow or tissue instead of their hands. Consider alternative work environments, such as telecommuting and staggered shifts, for employees at higher risk for complications from the novel H1N1 flu.

- Develop plans that emphasize the need for employees with flu-like symptoms, such as fever and either cough or sore throat to stay home. Waive requirements for workers to provide doctors' notes to justify their absence or to authorize their return to work. Revise, if needed, absenteeism and sick leave policies so that employees will be able to stay home when ill or if needed to care for ill family members.
- Prepare for higher absenteeism in case employees are ill or must stay home with sick children or schools close. Advise employees to develop contingency plans should their children become sick and need to leave school early or need to stay home.
- Stay informed. We encourage you to monitor the Virginia Department of Health website at [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov) and the CDC Web site at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).
- Meet with your local health department (see <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/lhd/>) to assure that your planning efforts are integrated and that the communication process for responding to and monitoring outbreaks of illness are clarified.

VDH will continue to monitor this situation and will keep local officials informed. If you have any questions or concerns this fall regarding the novel H1N1 virus, the vaccination program or other related health issues, please feel free to contact your local health department or call the VDH public inquiry center at 1-877-275-8343 (1-877-ASK-VDH3).

Thank you for your continued strong support and assistance,

Sincerely,



Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP  
State Health Commissioner