



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

October 13, 2009

### **A Message to State Employees from the State Health Commissioner**

With fall upon us, I would like to share some updated information concerning the novel H1N1 influenza virus. You may have seen or heard stories about the novel H1N1 flu virus in the media over the past few weeks. This virus remains a public health concern, particularly now that children are back in school. However, Virginia is prepared to respond effectively to this challenge. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is continuing to carefully plan for, respond to and monitor this situation.

VDH is developing a voluntary, statewide novel H1N1 influenza vaccination campaign. It is expected that this vaccine will become fully available to the public later this month or in early November through many of the same avenues that seasonal flu vaccine is provided (e.g., local health departments, physician offices, pharmacies). Vaccination is the single most important step that you and your family can take to protect yourselves from the novel H1N1 flu virus. VDH expects to have a sufficient amount of vaccine to immunize everyone who wishes to protect themselves against this new flu strain. Among the groups that are recommended for early novel H1N1 vaccination, according to guidelines from the federal Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), are pregnant women, household contacts and caregivers for children younger than six months of age, health care and emergency medical services personnel, all people from six months through 24 years of age, and persons between 24 and 64 years of age who have health conditions associated with higher risks of medical complications from influenza. VDH will be keeping the public informed with details concerning when, where and how the novel H1N1 vaccine can be received.

You should also receive the seasonal flu vaccine, which is separate from the novel H1N1 flu vaccine. The State Health Benefits Program is again offering free flu shots at participating network pharmacies. Details are available from the Department of Human Resource Management ([DHRM](#)).

You should review your emergency plans at home and at work. As part of your review of your emergency plans, you should consider how you will arrange to care for a child or other family member should he or she become ill. To date, the novel H1N1 virus has tended to disproportionately affect young people. VDH has been working closely with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) in order to provide information and guidance to local school districts. VDH and VDOE both believe that “Well children belong in school learning, ill children belong at home recovering.”

In addition, you should also give careful consideration, in conjunction with your supervisor, to available options for telecommuting. By enabling you to work from home, telecommuting is a tool that can help maintain distance between people who are ill and those who are not, thereby supporting our efforts to prevent the spread of disease. This can also enable you to work from home should you be required to help care for a child or other family member who is ill. The Department of Human Resource Management has prepared [teleworking assistance](#) and guidance for agencies. Telecommuting is also a key component of the Governor’s “Greening of State Government” Initiative, as specified in [Executive Order 82](#).

In order to prevent the spread of influenza, VDH recommends that you and your family take the following steps:

- Get your seasonal flu vaccination now if you have not already done so.
- Get your novel H1N1 vaccination within the next few weeks if you are in a priority group and next month (November) if you are not.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as that can spread the virus.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people, and avoid close contact with others if you are sick.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay at home until you have been without a fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures and avoiding crowds.
- You may want to buy a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs, tissues and other related items so that you are prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home.

VDH is your best source for up to date information concerning the novel H1N1 flu virus. VDH has established a toll-free number at 1-877-275-8343 (1-877-ASK-VDH3) in order to help answer questions that you may have concerning the novel H1N1 flu virus. You can also [submit your questions online](#).

Additional information is available on the VDH [Web site](#), as well as on the Virginia Department of Education [Web site](#), the CDC [Web site](#) and the HHS [Web site](#).

VDH will continue to carefully monitor this situation and, in close cooperation with DHRM, will keep state employees informed and up to date. Thank you for your continued cooperation and support in helping us protect the health of all Virginians.

Sincerely,  
Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP  
State Health Commissioner