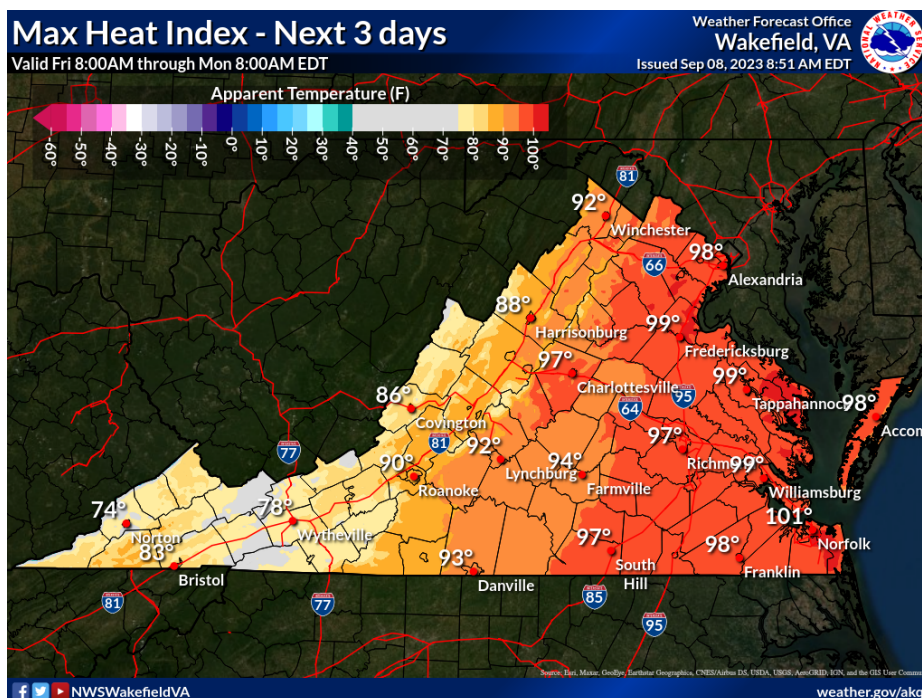


September 8, 2023

Key Takeaways

- Since the start of August, Virginia has reported sustained slow growth of COVID-19 hospital admissions. Despite this trend, admissions rates remain low compared to those of January's surge. Forecasts suggest that this trend will continue with minor growth expected in September.
- Other COVID-19 indicators corroborate the hospitalization data trends. Wastewater surveillance and COVID-like illness metrics also suggest sustained slow growth.
- COVID-19 variant proportions remain varied. EG.5 continues to grow as XBB.1.5 declines, but over a dozen other variants are active in the U.S.
- The new 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines could become available as early as next week. Pfizer and Moderna claim that their new vaccines will protect against the EG.5 and BA.2.86 variants. If approved, the vaccines will be available through routine [healthcare provider channels](#).
- Influenza and RSV remain at low levels in Virginia. But there is some evidence of RSV growth among children in Florida and Georgia.
- The NHC is tracking Hurricane Lee as it forms in the Atlantic. Models cannot yet predict if it will make landfall.
- A major heatwave hit Virginia this week resulting in 180 heat-related hospitalizations. The heatwave is expected to break over the weekend.

Key Figures



Crowd Forecasts

5.5%

Chance that the WHO will identify a new COVID-19 Variant of Concern in 2023. (*Metaculus forecast*)

16%

Chance that there will be a tropical weather related mandatory evacuation order for any part of Virginia in 2023. (*Metaculus forecast*)

2,640

Estimated total number of heat-related illness visits to the hospital in Virginia for 2023. (*Metaculus forecast*)

Wildfires

596 of 962

The number of uncontrolled wildfires in Canada, out of the total number of active fires.

Tropical Weather

2

The number of active storms currently being tracked in the Atlantic Ocean.

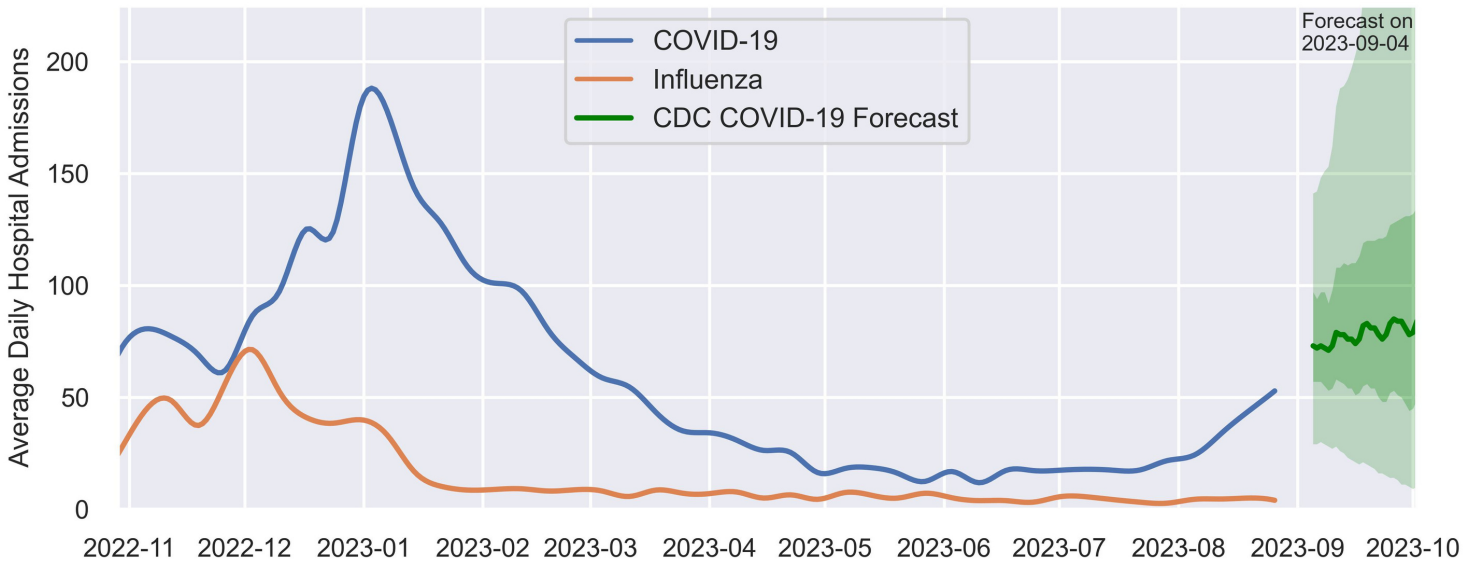
Spotlight: Severe Weather

Forecasts are italicized

Respiratory Illness

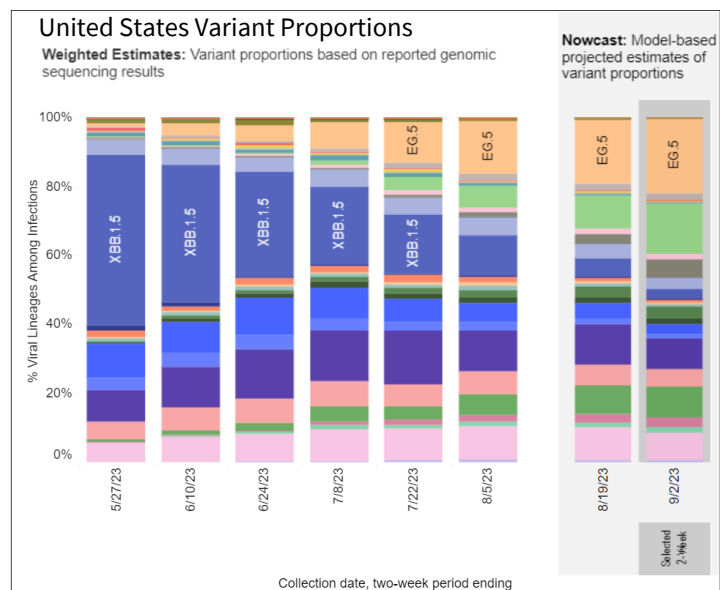
- **COVID-19 hospitalizations grow in Virginia, but remain low.** This week the Commonwealth reported 4.06 hospital admissions per 100,000 residents. This is similar to last week’s rate, but still represents a noticeable increase since the start of August. Despite this growth, values remain significantly lower than they were during the surge in January. The CDC classifies the current level of admissions as “Low”. Influenza rates remain largely unchanged (below).
- **CDC forecasts minor growth in COVID-19 hospitalizations.** The latest ensemble forecast (shown below), suggests that Virginia could experience more mild growth in September. These models do not expect Virginia to exceed a rate of 100 daily hospitalizations. The Commonwealth would need to average about 125 daily admissions to reach the CDC’s threshold for a “Medium” admissions level. There are no Influenza forecasts at this time.

Virginia Daily Hospital Admissions



This graph shows historical hospital admissions for COVID-19 and Influenza, as well as the CDC’s ensemble forecast for future COVID-19 admissions. The green shading represents 50% and 95% confidence intervals on future forecasts. Historical data source: [HealthData.gov](https://www.healthdata.gov), forecast data source: [CDC CFA](https://www.cdc.gov/cfa/).

- **Other COVID-19 indicators suggest slow growth.** As with hospitalizations, the rate of COVID-Like Illness Visits and Diagnoses at emergency departments is up substantially since August, but rates are still far lower than those of last January’s surge. Two wastewater surveillance sites are showing significant growth, but most remain in plateau or below detection. These indicators are consistent with sustained mild growth.
- **Substantial diversity of COVID-19 variants persists.** EG.5 (Eris) has recently supplanted XBB.1.5 as the “dominant” variant in the United States. But over a dozen other variants continue to circulate nationally. EG.5. is likely to continue slowly displacing its peers.
- **Limited impact from other respiratory viruses.** Current rates of influenza and RSV are low in Virginia, though RSV growth is being seen in other states.



Current and forecast variant proportions in the United States. The CDC has not forecast variant proportions for Virginia’s HHS region (3).

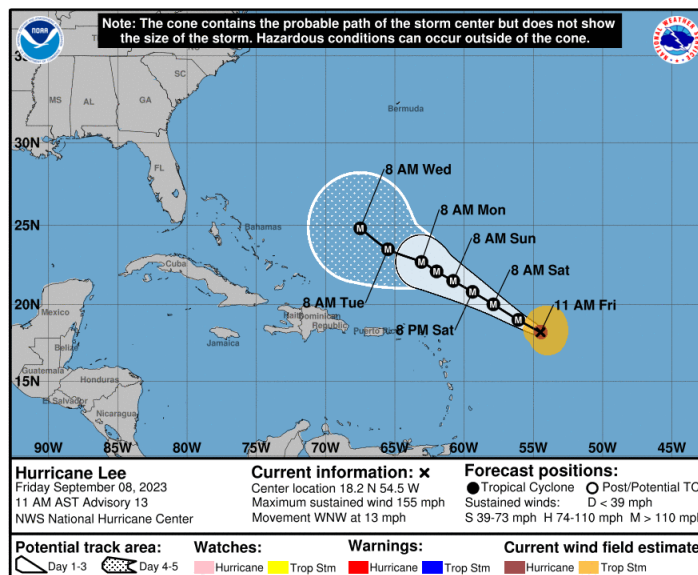
Spotlight

- **National Hurricane Center tracking Hurricane Lee.** The storm has rapidly intensified and become a major hurricane. It is not known if the hurricane will make landfall or not. Most models suggest it won't. But it could cause dangerous coastal flooding, high surf, and powerful rip currents without reaching land. It could also create hazardous offshore conditions. Meteorologists will be tracking it carefully as it continues to develop in the coming days. Currently, the storm poses no immediate threat to Virginia.
- **Flood recovery is ongoing in West Virginia.** A state of emergency was declared last week for five counties in southern West Virginia as both floodwaters and mudslides closed highways. The WV Department of Highways has reopened most roads in the area, but the cleanup of roadside debris is ongoing.
- **Heatwave slams Virginia; expected to end soon.** Last week saw extreme temperatures blanket much of the Commonwealth, with records being set at all three of the major DC-area airports. The heat was so extreme that schools in Buckingham County sent their students home early. Last week also saw a surge of 180 emergency department visits for heat-related illness in Virginia. The current heatwave is expected to end over the weekend, as temperatures return to the mid-80s F for most of Virginia by next week.

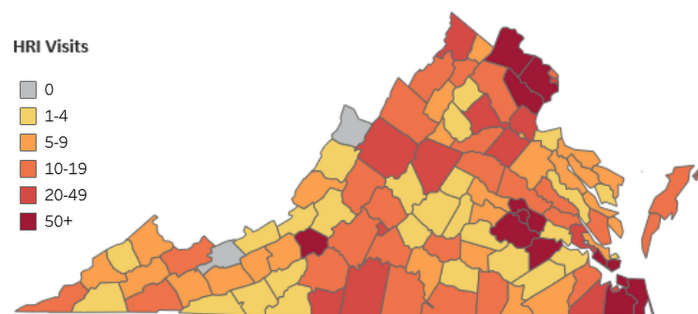
Other News

- **New 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines expected to be authorized by next week.** The FDA could authorize the new vaccines as early as September 8. Following that, the CDC could update their COVID-19 vaccine recommendations on September 12. If approved, the vaccines would become available through routine healthcare provider channels.
- **New 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines expected to be effective against the BA.2.86 variant.** The new COVID-19 vaccines are based on the XBB.1.5 variant. There was initially some concern that they would not be effective against newer variants. However, both Pfizer and Moderna claim that their new 2023-2024 vaccines protect against the BA.2.86 variant as well as the currently dominant EG.5 (Eris) variant.

Severe Weather



Hurricane Lee is far offshore and poses no immediate threat. It is not known if the storm will make landfall. Image source: NOAA.



This map shows heat related illness (HRI) hospital visits in 2023. Heatwaves pose a sizable risk to the vulnerable. Source: VDH.

- **Early indicators suggest RSV season may be starting in the Southeast.** The CDC issued a health alert network notice on Tuesday in response to signs of RSV growth in Florida and Georgia. The latter is also reporting a noteworthy increase in childhood hospitalizations.
- **Rise in fatal *Vibrio vulnificus* cases on East Coast.** Historically a problem for Gulf coast states, *Vibrio* spp. infections have increased eight fold in the last twenty years. Last Friday the CDC issued a health alert network notice detailing fatal *V. vulnificus* cases in Connecticut, New York, and North Carolina. It is thought that unusually warm water temperatures are to blame for the increase in cases this year. *Vibrio* forecasts for the Chesapeake Bay can be viewed here.