

December 15, 2023

Key Takeaways

- Mixed COVID-19 metrics suggest growth may be slowing. ED diagnoses are down slightly, as are wastewater viral loads. Yet most districts are still in growth trajectories. Holiday travel, winter weather, and changing variant proportions may bring renewed growth in the coming weeks.
- Influenza activity is now “High” in Virginia. The Influenza A(H1) strain dominates. Early indicators hint at the start of a decline for RSV rates.
- Hospitalizations are down slightly for COVID-19 and up for flu. Models suggest combined hospital admissions will grow mildly through 2024.
- Storms with the potential for high winds are expected across much of Virginia Sunday evening. Gusts could exceed 50 mph near the coast.
- Politically motivated threats and harassment highlight the potential for unrest during the 2024 general election season.

Key Figures

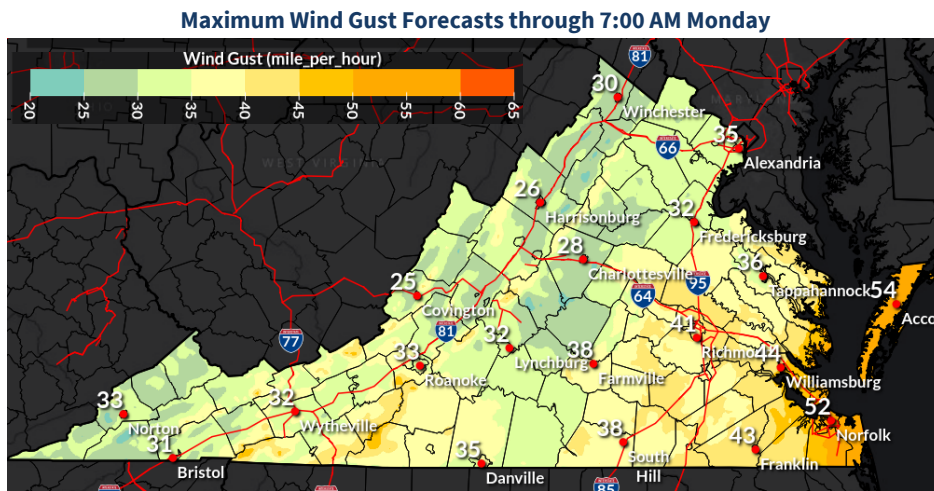


Image Source: NWS

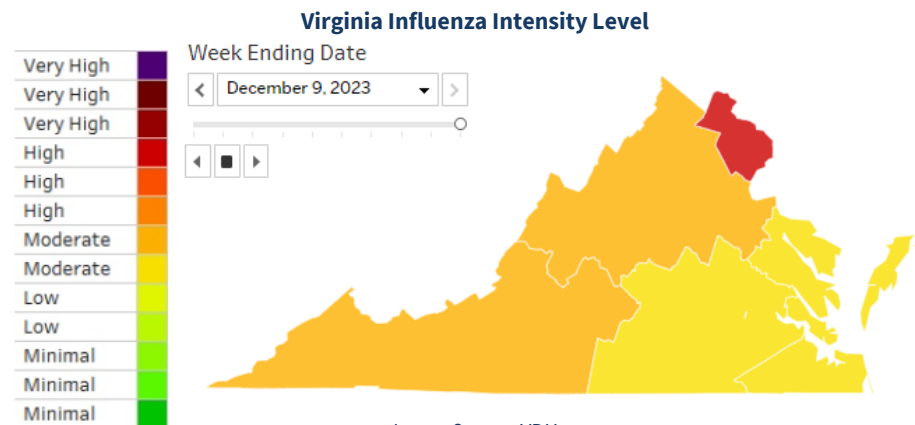


Image Source: VDH

COVID-19

Low

Characterization of COVID-19 hospital admissions and hospital occupancy in Virginia as of Dec 9.

Influenza

High

Statewide influenza activity levels in Virginia, as of Dec 9.

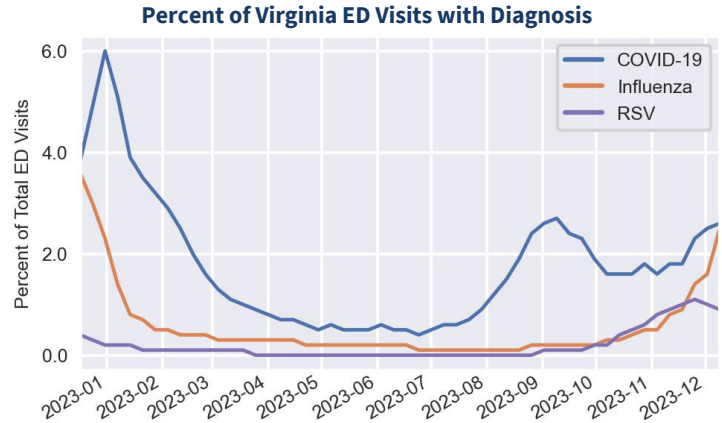
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Virginia regions with a High influenza intensity level, as of Dec 9. The rest are all at Moderate levels.

Spotlight:
Political Threats

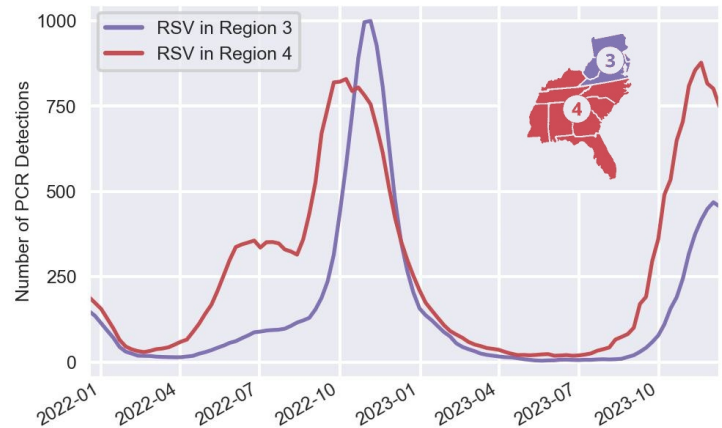
Respiratory Illness

- **Mixed COVID-19 indicators suggest slow growth.** COVID-19 diagnoses remained steady from last week. Wastewater viral loads receded slightly, but many sites are still reporting high levels. Conversely, 29 of the 35 health districts are in growth trajectories, and the statewide reproductive number (R_e) is about 1.2. These mixed signals hint at continued slow growth.
- **Influenza activity increases in Virginia.** As flu rates swell globally, the Commonwealth reached a “High” influenza activity level. Lab reports suggest Influenza A(H1N1) is the most common strain in Virginia.
- **COVID-19 hospitalizations dip; flu grows.** COVID-19 hospital admissions dropped slightly this week while admissions for flu increased by 8%. CDC forecasts continue to suggest that hospitalizations caused by COVID-19 will remain steady, while those caused by the flu will grow slowly through January.
- **More evidence of RSV slowing.** RSV hospitalizations in Tennessee and Maryland have declined for two weeks in a row. The same can be said for the rate of PCR detections of RSV in HHS Region 4 (Southeast).
- **Vaccination for seasonal respiratory diseases is low in the U.S.** A CDC Health Advisory notes flu and COVID-19 vaccination rates are lagging previous years. Uptake of the new RSV vaccine is also low. The 2023-24 COVID-19 vaccine is expected to be effective against newly emerging variants like JN.1.



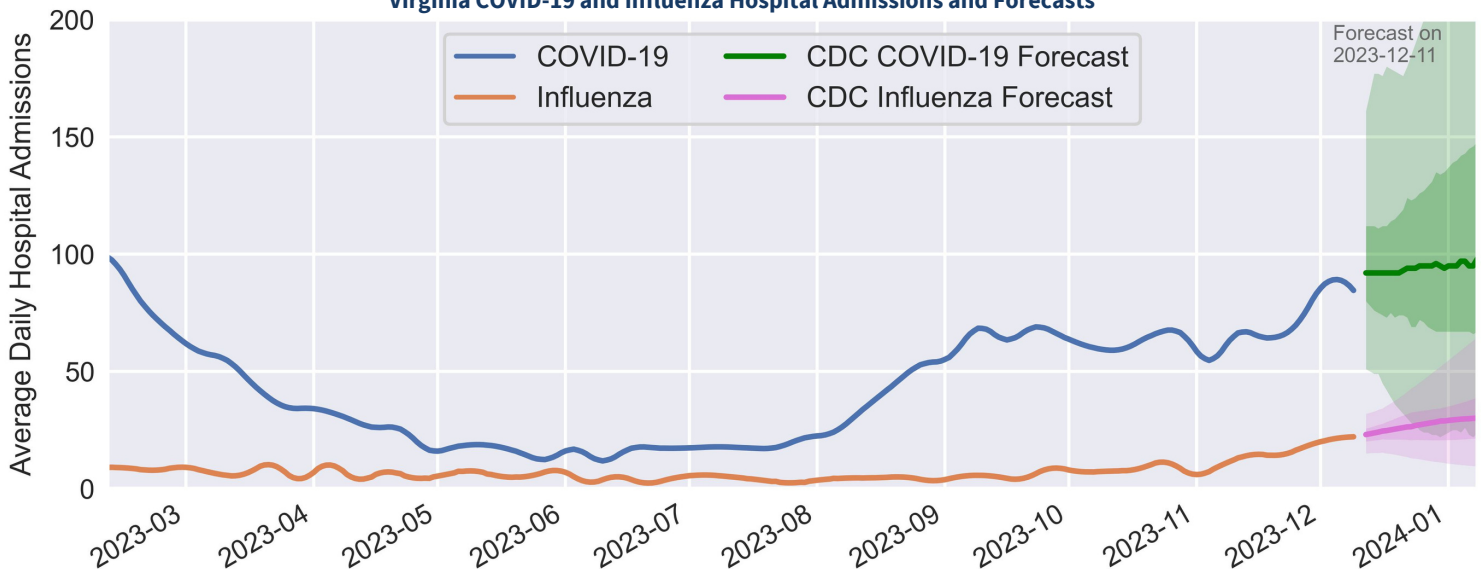
The rate of flu diagnoses at Emergency Departments has gone up sharply in the last few weeks, and now rivals that of COVID-19. RSV diagnoses have fallen for two weeks in a row. Data Source: CDC.

RSV PCR Detections in Regions 3 (inc. VA) and 4 (Southeast)



PCR detections of RSV continue to fall in Region 4. Data Source: CDC.

Virginia COVID-19 and Influenza Hospital Admissions and Forecasts



Models suggest mild growth of hospitalizations through January. 50% and 95% confidence intervals are shown as dark and light shading respectively. Historical data source: HealthData.gov, COVID-19 forecast data source: CDC CFA, flu forecast data source: CDC FluSight.

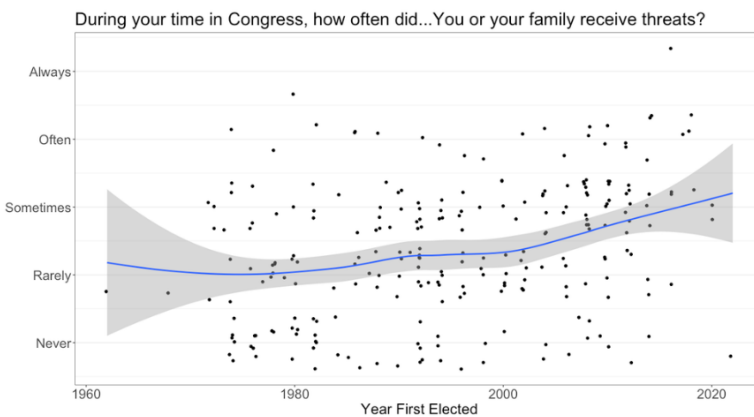
Spotlight

- **More than half of local health district directors reported harassment** of themselves, their staff, or agencies during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost a third of LHD directors resigned, retire or were fired from their positions.
- **Two Lynchburg city council members and a congressional representative were targeted in threats on social media** over the weekend. Earlier this month, members of the Lynchburg school board also received death threats after a controversial vote.
- **In a recent survey, 84% of former members of the US Congress indicated they were concerned about the possibility of violence during the 2024 elections.** In a separate survey, 23% of Americans indicated that political conditions may warrant a “resort to violence”.

Other News

- **A fire forced the evacuation of all patients from a Rome hospital.** Almost 200 patients were evacuated, with critical patients transported to nearby hospitals via ambulances. Other patients were temporarily housed in a local gymnasium before being transported to other facilities. Meanwhile, a norovirus outbreak forced the closure of four wards in a Middleborough hospital.
- **Cases and deaths associated with mpox virus in the Democratic Republic of Congo continue to rise.** The WHO is currently investigating whether Clade I MPVX, the strain responsible for the mpox outbreak in the DRC, can be sexually transmitted. Thus far, all cases tested in the US were caused by the Clade II MPVX strain, but health care providers are encouraged to collect detailed travel and sexual health history in all suspected cases.

Political Threats



A recent survey administered by the UMass Poll among 300 former members of Congress found that members first elected in recent years received threats more frequently than those who were first elected in previous years.
Image Source: [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#)

- **The United Nations humanitarian office stated that Gaza is facing a public health disaster**, including a high potential for epidemics. The WHO infectious diseases, including respiratory infections, diarrhea, and lice, are spreading among displaced individuals overcrowded shelters and temporary living facilities.
- **Greene County schools and public offices were closed for a day due to water main leaks.** The county has issued three boil water advisory in the past four weeks, with the most recent advisory was lifted for all customers on Saturday.
- **Gummy bears tainted with fentanyl blamed for illnesses at an Amherst, VA elementary school.** Seven students became ill after consuming the bears from a bag that tested positive for the drug.