



Governor Glenn Youngkin

Updated COVID-19 Action Plan

Shortly after Governor Youngkin's inauguration, he established and released his COVID-19 Action Plan crafted with his Secretary of Health and Human Resources, John Littel. Since announcing his plan, the Governor has followed through on his promises by encouraging individuals to get vaccinated to protect themselves and their neighbors through public service announcements, expanding vaccination event efforts, dispersing rapid tests, and providing flexibility and support to our healthcare facilities while also empowering individuals to make health care decisions that work for them and their families.

In addition to expanding these efforts in the fight against COVID-19, he is applying both science and commonsense to make sure that we protect both lives and livelihoods. Governor Youngkin is establishing a path forward to ensure that we keep Virginians healthy and keep our Commonwealth open for business through his updated action plan that includes provisions to reduce cumbersome regulations which have had significant negative impacts on Virginians. While we will remain vigilant, it is time to start planning for a return to normalcy.

COVID-19 VACCINE MARSHALL PLAN FOR VIRGINIA

Governor Youngkin is devoting additional resources and efforts to encouraging the nearly 1.6 million Virginians who are still unvaccinated to get the COVID-19 vaccine and booster. We have focused on facts and science to empower Virginians with choices, not mandates. Data shows that people vaccinated from COVID-19 are significantly less likely to be hospitalized than those who are not. Governor Youngkin's actions include:

1. Working with local community experts and "trusted voices," especially in disproportionately unvaccinated communities to ensure that the messages are appropriate and fact-based. Governor Youngkin has spoken about this frequently and recently released video and audio PSAs encouraging individuals to get vaccinated.

Governor Youngkin and Secretary Littel hosted round table discussions about COVID-19 vaccination with community leaders in Southwest and Central Virginia. In Petersburg, he was joined by the First Lady and the Acting Commissioner of Health.

Additionally, the following initiatives are underway:

- The Virginia Department of Health conducted research about marketing messages that resonate with Virginians who have not yet received the vaccine. Earlier this month, they produced a video series highlighting the stories of rural Virginians and other target demographics who advocate for the vaccine in their communities and are sharing those videos in communities across the Commonwealth.
 - Launched Vaccine Communications on Hesitancy Education Workgroup (VCHEW) to identify barriers and solutions in populations with lower vaccination rates.
 - Partnered with Historically Black Colleges and Universities to promote testing, vaccination and address vaccine hesitancy in Black young adults and their surrounding communities.
 - Partnered with faith-based organizations throughout the Commonwealth to promote vaccination and address vaccine hesitancy in surrounding communities.
 - Supported the development and launch of tele-town halls focused on providing schools and parents information about the COVID-19 vaccine. Engaging local health district representatives and pediatrician partners as subject matter experts to specifically address hesitations from parents of young children about COVID-19 vaccines. So far, 17 health districts have expressed their interest in supporting tele-town halls for their school communities and event scheduling is underway.
 - Conducted school-based vaccination clinics in target areas to support access to the COVID-19 vaccine for children who do not have regular health care providers. These were done in collaboration between the VDOE, VDH, and local health districts.
 - Spanish language marketing campaigns to promote vaccination, boosters, pediatric vaccination, and other COVID-19 public health guidance, which parallel the concurrent English-language campaigns.
 - In collaboration with the Department of Medical Assistance Services and the Medicaid managed care organizations, working on incentive and other programs to identify unvaccinated populations and plan vaccination events and targeted communications to encourage vaccination and address vaccine hesitancy.
2. The original plan called for 120 COVID-19 vaccine events across the Commonwealth. As directed, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources and VDH deployed resources to significantly increase that number. Between January 20 and February 19, over 1,000 vaccine events occurred. There are 948 events planned through the end of April.
 3. Additional Mobile Vaccine Units were deployed to rural communities. Since January 1, 2022, VDH has conducted 15 Pharmacy Clinics which focused in areas with low vaccination rates. There are more than 200 mobile events scheduled for first, second, and booster doses through March 2022 (e.g., schools, places of worship, partners).

EXPANDED HEALTH CARE FLEXIBILITY, SUPPORT, & TREATMENT

Governor Youngkin recognizes that Virginia's hospitals and healthcare facilities are in crisis. Even with diminishing cases and fewer hospitalizations, these facilities continue to struggle. Governor Glenn Youngkin signed Executive Orders #11 and #16 to give health care providers flexibility and support to battle staffing shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and unconstitutional federal mandates on health care workers.

According to the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association, there are 9,300 open permanent nursing positions, 5,900 of which are jobs in hospitals. This represents a 77% increase since January 2020.

We must make sure that patients who delayed care during the pandemic are able to get that care today.

These executive orders allowed facilities to open several hundred additional beds (144 ICU beds; 467 med/surg beds; 9 long term care beds) and increase staffing to serve these patients.

Governor Youngkin's actions include:

1. Creating appropriate exemptions to scope of practice requirements to allow health care providers to care for patients in this difficult time
2. Allowing hospitals and other healthcare facilities (assisted living and nursing homes) to rapidly expand bed capacity by temporarily waiving regulations
3. Expanding flexibility, overtime hours, and availability for personal care workers
4. Providing flexibility for licensed out-of-state nurses and health care professionals to practice in Virginia
5. Redirecting resources to assist with the access and availability of therapeutics and expanding the number of providers available to offer oral therapeutics, including allowing therapeutics to be distributed at hospitals without onsite pharmacies
 - a. VDH created guidance on dispensing oral antivirals in hospitals emergency departments, which can be found [here](#) on the [VDH COVID-19 Therapeutics website](#).
 - b. Hospitals and health systems now have the capability to order oral antivirals through the VaxMaX Portal and dispense treatment directly from their emergency departments.

- c. VDH continues to update providers with timely information through a bi-weekly therapeutics newsletter, and regular calls with hospital clinicians (bi-weekly) and leadership (monthly); and, conducted eight webinars since January 20, 2022.
6. Ensure appropriate reimbursement for innovative treatment solutions for individuals, including telemedicine, like safe at home programs that allow individuals with mild symptoms to receive care remotely. Work is underway for a mail order oral antiviral program and a pharmacy model to support therapeutics for long term care facilities.
7. The blood supply levels, though still low from a historical perspective, have improved. We continue to encourage blood donation and support for the Red Cross.

CHARTING A PATH TO NORMALCY

The pandemic is not over, and we must all stay vigilant about the health risks of COVID-19. We recognize how difficult this pandemic has been for many families who have lost loved ones and suffered other hardships. Widespread vaccination and growing awareness about natural immunity should guide us as we consider the path towards more normal work, school, and social environments. A recent study conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation on behalf of The Associated Press estimates that 73% of the US population already has some immunity to Omicron. This is consistent with work done on infection status by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

As cases and hospitalizations begin to decline, we should individually and collectively consider our own risk tolerance and what precautions we might change as the pandemic evolves. Again, the most important precaution currently available is the vaccine and booster. For some, masking and social distancing are additional steps that they will follow. We should respect that choice. For others, especially those who have been fully vaccinated or have natural immunity, they may determine that face to face interactions are the best option, and those decisions should be respected too. As a community moving forward, we must respect each other and their ability to determine the level of risk that is appropriate for them.

Many localities and institutions have already relaxed social distancing and opened up spaces that have been closed in the past. With the expanding availability of testing and widespread vaccinations, many businesses and governments, including the Commonwealth of Virginia, are planning to bring employees back to the workplace.

Governor Youngkin is committed to creating a better future for all Virginians, and that includes refocusing health care on the whole of an individual and the whole of health care infrastructure. Individuals who have their health care needs met and are addressing underlying conditions can better handle new health risks. Communities that have stronger healthcare systems with higher staff retention and more access to available resources are better prepared to support their neighbors.

We have seen the negative impacts of COVID-19 on individuals' other health care needs as they have been struggling to maintain the necessary care to keep those needs addressed or managed. We have seen those with obesity, diabetes, asthma, and other underlying conditions to be more at risk, which is why Governor Youngkin wants to refocus resources on caring for the whole of an individual. Additionally, over the last two years, mental health has become a significant issue, especially for younger generations. Working with communities to address these underlying needs will be at the forefront of the Commonwealth's efforts.