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Virgin Islanders Advised to Vaccinate Against Respiratory Illnesses as Spike in U.S., 360 Flu-Related Deaths Prompt Concern

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An increase in respiratory viruses on the mainland are anticipated to affect the U.S Virgin Islands as the winter tourist season draws nearer, according to local health officials.

V.I. Dept. of Health Asst. Commissioner Reuben Molloy said during the Bryan administration's weekly press briefing Monday that early national reports show “high activity” with regard to respiratory illnesses which have caused loss of working and school days.

For that reason, Mr. Molloy is encouraging parents with children six months and older to have them vaccinated against influenza since the illness appears to affect them the most.

“The flu season is occurring earlier this year and is posing an even greater public health threat than usual,” he said. “These severe consequences can be avoided by getting vaccinated against the flu. We are urging all parents over the age of six months to vaccinate their children for the flu now.”

Mr. Molloy believes that the flu vaccine will significantly reduce the risk of illness in this period.

“Over the past several weeks, the Department of Health has urged Virgin Islanders to also get their 2022 influenza vaccine when getting their Covid-19 vaccine and boosters. We would like to strongly reiterate this recommendation for adults, adolescence and children,” he said.

Decrease in appetite, trouble breathing, fever, coughing, runny nose and headache are all signs of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and should be treated as early as possible to reduce chances of severe illness or death.

In addition, Mr. Molloy shared that the mainland has reported an early spike in RSV which has increased hospital admissions nation-wide.

D.O.H. and the V.I. Dept. of Human Services, he said, recorded that 76 percent of national pediatric admissions were due to the flu while the U.S. Center for Diseases Control has already reported 360 flu-related deaths and one pediatric flu related fatality as of Friday October, 26th, 2022.

“Hospitalizations across the U.S. hit record levels not normally seen at this time of the year due to severe respiratory illness. Traditionally, the flu season begins to see an increase in hospital admissions in December, not October,” he added.