



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Vermont Nurse Volunteers to Vaccinate Her Community

Mark National Influenza Vaccination Week (Jan. 10-16)
with the H1N1 Flu Shot or Nasal Spray

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Media Contact: Communication Office
Vermont Department of Health
802-863-7281

MANCHESTER - Holly DeForest, an emergency room nurse at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center, was about to give an H1N1 flu shot when the 5-year-old boy seated with his arm exposed said, "Wait. I have very sensitive skin."

Another child, already vaccinated, sitting in a chair watching a movie insisted, "It doesn't hurt." The 5-year-old got his shot. Another Vermonter protected.

The Vermont Department of Health is promoting H1N1 vaccination for everyone older than 6 months during National Influenza Vaccination Week (January 10-16), and recognizing those individuals who have strengthened the state's efforts to vaccinate as many people as possible.

DeForest has vaccinated several hundred people as a **Vermont Emergency Response Volunteer (VERV)** at three clinics in Manchester, including two at Manchester Elementary/Middle School and one at Burr and Burton Academy.

What convinced DeForest to enlist in the Health Department's VERV program were the patients she was caring for in the emergency room.

"This influenza is not a cold. It's much more severe," said DeForest, 57, a registered nurse for the past 20 years. "It is all encompassing of the body. You have a cold, cough, fever, headache, runny nose, sore throat, some are vomiting and may have diarrhea as well."

Nearly every nurse DeForest works with in the emergency room in the Bennington hospital volunteers their skills, she said. She describes her co-workers as a "tight-knit" unit that support each other both inside and outside their professional lives.

"We turn to each other in many situations and I think living where we live, I wanted to give something back to Manchester," she said.

DeForest signed up to volunteer in response to the H1N1 outbreak two months ago after being recruited by an e-mail invitation.

Christian Phelps, RN, EMT-Paramedic who is the EMS and emergency preparedness director for Southwestern Vermont Medical Center, understands that for any mass vaccination campaign such as the one undertaken by the Health Department and state partners, skilled medical volunteers are imperative for the campaign to succeed.

"Medical professionals, such as Holly, typically enjoy being able to serve their communities in a direct way," Phelps explained. "Until VERV, we lacked the ability to connect medical professionals throughout the state with state agencies and community partners where those professionals were needed. VERV is an outstanding program that makes our collective ability to respond much more robust."

As a career hospital nurse, DeForest enjoys the diversity of her job and the unexpected priorities of each day.

"Caring for the population from infancy to geriatric, I see the whole spectrum and that is what is interesting in a hospital and in the emergency room," DeForest said. "You have to utilize all of your skills. You are thinking on your feet and responding. The young school kids are adorable, and the older ones are nervous, but they know. And they understand. They know that they do not want to catch the flu."

H1N1 vaccine is now widely available in plentiful quantities with many health care providers, hospitals, worksites, pharmacies and public clinics around the state.

Vaccine is also available at these participating locations: Shaws-Osco Pharmacy in Colchester, South Burlington, Williston, Berlin and Waterbury; Rite Aid in Derby, Bellows Falls, St. Albans and Williston; Walgreens in Rutland and Brattleboro, and Walmart in Williston and Rutland.

To locate a public clinic, go to the Health Department's website at www.healthvermont.gov, then select "**Get Vaccinated**" at the top of the home page, or dial 2-1-1

To become a VERV volunteer visit: <http://healthvermont.gov/emerg/verv/index.html>

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Vermont Department of Health | 108 Cherry Street | Burlington, VT 05402
Voice: 802-863-7200 | In Vermont 800-464-4343 | Fax: 802-865-7754 | TTY/TDD: Dial 711 first
Health Care Provider Infectious Disease Reporting: 802-863-7240 or 800-640-4374
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