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INTRODUCTION

VA conducts annual surveillance for seasonal influenza. VA's large elderly population is at higher risk for influenza complications, including hospitalization and death. Herein we summarize VA's 2019-20 national surveillance data for influenza activity and vaccinations.

METHODS

Influenza telephone triage, influenza-like illness (ILI) encounters and antiviral prescriptions plus outpatient visits, laboratory testing (antibody and repeat tests excluded), hospitalizations and deaths for influenza were obtained from VA data sources (9/29/19 – 8/15/20) and compared to prior seasons and national CDC FluView data. Influenza vaccinations were captured starting 8/1/2019. Vaccination rates were calculated based on unique users of VA care for each fiscal year.

RESULTS

- In 2019-20, VA-administered vaccination rate increased to 34% and adjuvanted vaccine increased to 26% of total vaccine given (Table).
- ILI visits ranged from 0.9%-3.1% and overall activity peaked during 2020 Weeks 6 & 7 and dropped rapidly beginning Week 12, matching trends reported by CDC (Figure 1).
- Testing revealed 23,401 influenza positives out of 176,956 tests performed (13.2%). Percent positive was slightly higher compared to the prior season (12%).
- 17% of laboratory-confirmed influenza cases were hospitalized (compared to 23% during prior season) with a median length of stay for 3 days.
- Total influenza positives, telephone triage encounters, outpatient visits and antiviral use were higher than the prior season, whereas coded hospitalizations and deaths were fewer (Table, Figure 2)

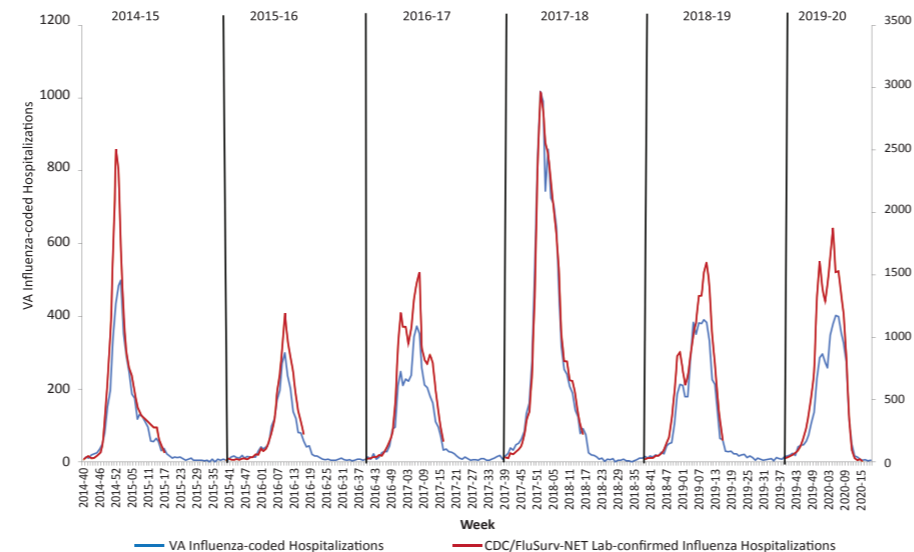
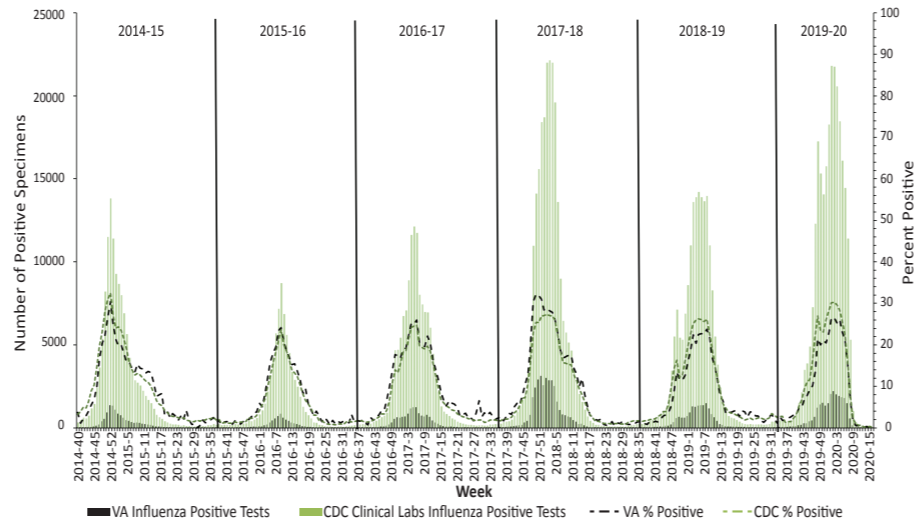
Table. Select VA Influenza Surveillance Measures, 2014-15 through 2019-20 Seasons

VA Influenza (Flu) Metrics	2014-15 N (%)	2015-16 N (%)	2016-17 N (%)	2017-18 N (%)	2018-19 N (%)	2019-20 N (%)
Flu Vaccinations [‡]	1,844,279 (30)	1,844,856 (29)	1,840,275 (15)	1,931,290 (30)	1,968,120 (31)	2,198,138 (34)
High-Dose/Adjuvanted	101,978 (6)	179,202 (10)	279,484 (15)	377,507 (20)	412,916 (22)	548,339 (26)
Flu Telephone Triage	10,348	8,397	Not available	14,185	11,821	19,297
Flu Outpatient Visits	10,724	8,693	16,190	39,381	21,673	27,613
Flu Hospitalizations	4,673	2,658	4,415	10,341	5,261	4,747
Median Length of Stay	4 days	4 days	4 days	3 days	3 days	3 days
Deaths [†]	139 (3)	79 (3)	147 (3)	398 (4)	188 (4)	126 (3)
Flu Lab Tests	70,836	62,058	93,108	161,994	141,277	176,956
Total Positive	11,506 (16)	6,389 (10)	13,739 (15)	33,292 (21)	17,062 (12)	23,401 (13)
Influenza A	9,058 (79)	4,428 (69)	10,330 (75)	22,411 (67)	16,141 (95)	17,694 (76)
Influenza B	2,355 (20)	1,888 (30)	3,352 (24)	10,764 (32)	875 (5)	5,628 (24)
A&B/Not Specified	93 (1)	73 (1)	57 (<1)	117 (<1)	46 (<1)	79 (<1)
Flu Antivirals	32,826	16,983	32,462	68,858	36,105	41,538
Inpatient	7,539	4,073	8,774	15,637	8,831	8,613
Outpatient	25,287	12,910	23,588	53,221	27,274	32,925

[‡] High-Dose (Fluzone) vaccine was available 2014-15 through 2017-18 seasons and adjuvanted vaccine (Fluad) in 2018-19 and 2019-20. Standard dose was quadrivalent in 2017-18 through 2019-20 seasons and trivalent in prior seasons. Vaccines include those given by VA or through VA's retail pharmacy program.

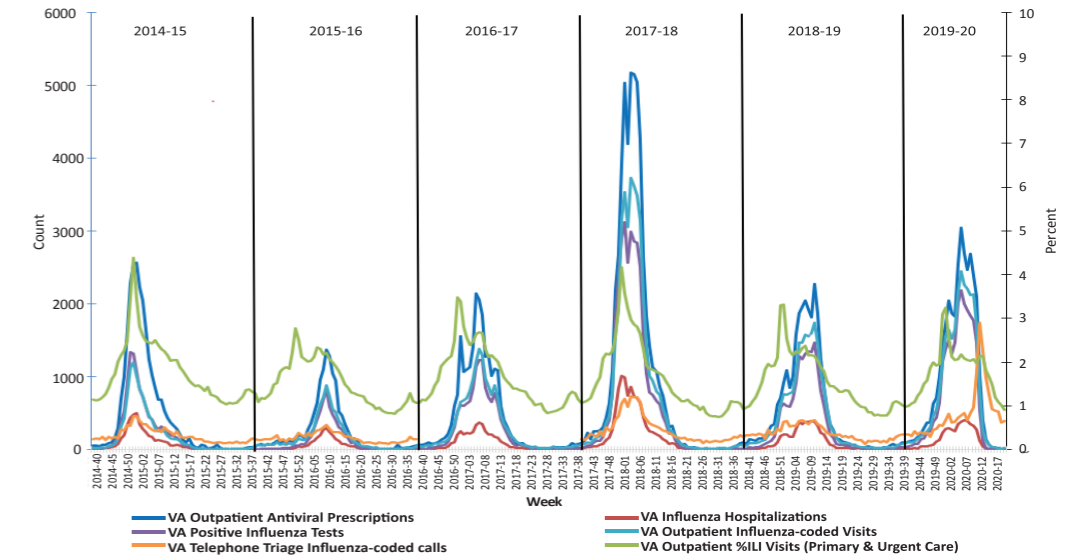
[†]Deaths during an influenza coded hospitalization (record reviews were not performed to assess cause of death).

Figure 1. Comparison of select VA and CDC Influenza Indicators Influenza positive laboratory tests and %positive (top) and influenza hospitalizations (bottom), by season.



Note: CDC national data accessed from: <https://gis.cdc.gov/grasp/fluview/fluportaldashboard.html> and <https://gis.cdc.gov/grasp/fluview/FluHospChars.html> Data through 2020 Week 20 shown above.

Figure 2. Comparison of key VA Influenza Indicators, by season.



Note: Due to server migration, telephone triage data was not available for the 2016-17 season.

CONCLUSIONS

- The 2019-20 influenza season was of moderate severity when compared to prior seasons and tracked well with national CDC data.¹
- Overall, vaccination levels have increased modestly and high-dose/adjuvanted vaccine administration increased from 6 to 26% of total vaccine given over the seasons evaluated.
- Influenza activity dropped precipitously after Week 12 even though testing for influenza remained high in the setting of COVID-19. This may have been due to widespread social distancing and masking measures adopted in response to COVID-19.
- Increase seen in telephone triage calls during spring 2020 (Fig. 2) was likely related to the COVID-19 pandemic and overlap in symptoms between influenza and COVID-19.

LIMITATIONS

- ICD-10-CM codes were used to identify hospitalizations and outpatient visits and do not necessarily represent laboratory confirmed cases.
- Outpatient influenza vaccination data was based on procedure codes, which may be subject to miscoding errors. BCMA inpatient vaccination data was not available for 10 of 234 VA inpatient facilities. Vaccination data does not include employee vaccinations or vaccines given in non-VA settings except for the VA Retail Pharmacy program/Community Care Network.
- Laboratory testing data from non-VA hospitalizations was not available.

REFERENCES

1. US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. FluView Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report. Accessed at: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>