

Division of Health Surveillance – Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section June 2010

Vermont Emergency Response Volunteers (VERV) and the 2009 H1N1 Influenza Response

- Vermont Emergency Response Volunteers (VERV) add critical capacity to respond to emergencies.
- VERV volunteers helped Vermont achieve the 2nd highest H1N1 flu vaccination uptake rates in the U.S.

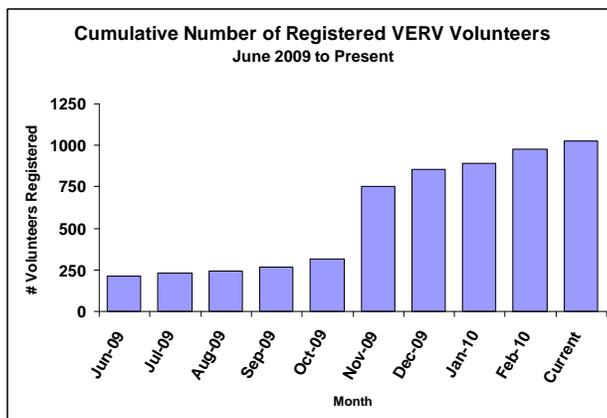
After 9/11 and the anthrax attacks, Congress passed legislation requiring states to implement an “Emergency System for the Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals,” or ESAR-VHP. Rapidly mobilizing organized groups of volunteer health care professionals to help meet demands for care after emergencies can help prevent excess morbidity and mortality. VERV is Vermont’s approach to providing such volunteers, but VERV also includes non-healthcare volunteers to act in supporting roles.

VERV and H1N1:

Vermont’s response to the 2009-10 influenza pandemic included plans to rapidly vaccinate groups considered at greater risk for complications, especially children. To help meet this challenge, VDH chose to conduct vaccination clinics in schools, to hold public clinics, and to provide vaccine to private Vermont providers. To accomplish this massive effort, many helping hands were needed. In addition to using personnel from VDH District Offices, nurses from Visiting Nursing Associations, and school nurses, VDH also asked VERV to help staff clinics. In response, 75 VERV volunteers helped to administer vaccines, manage clinic flow, and offer comfort to children. Since VERV volunteers often worked in their own communities, they added recognizable and reassuring faces to the effort. VERV volunteers were key to Vermont’s successful response, helping the state achieve the second highest vaccine uptake rate nationwide.

The H1N1 pandemic added momentum to VERV’s recruitment efforts (see the chart below). Currently, 1,025 volunteers have registered, including over 400 nurses, 41 physicians, 68 EMTs and paramedics and a host of other health professions (see the table below). Although most volunteers are health professionals, one need not be one in order to provide service. Many helping hands are needed during emergencies.

In the year ahead, VERV volunteers will participate in training exercises on mass prophylaxis and out-of-hospital care plans. VERV’s value in helping meet needs during emergencies depends on trainings like these.



Volunteer Type	Number registered, as of May, 2010
Nurse (RN, APRN, LPN, LVN)	441
EMT, Paramedic	68
Physician	41
Physician Assistant	11
Other healthcare professionals, e.g. pharmacist, laboratorian, respiratory therapist, social worker	55
Other community volunteers	409

Summary:

Public health emergencies such as the attacks on 9/11/2001, the 2001 anthrax attacks, the 2005 flooding after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and, more recently, the 2009-10 influenza pandemic highlight the value of well-organized groups of volunteers. Vermont’s VERV registry offers Vermont residents a way to play valuable roles in emergencies. Whether you are a nurse, physician, pharmacist, laboratorian, social worker, mental health professional or other health care provider, or if you are simply interested in helping support health care providers during emergencies, please consider registering with VERV.

For more information, including online training, visit [VERV](http://healthvermont.gov/emerg/verv/index.html) (<http://healthvermont.gov/emerg/verv/index.html>).

The *Infectious Disease Bulletin* can be viewed at: <http://healthvermont.gov/pubs/IDB/index.aspx>
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