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Via email to: vic.faculty@racgp.org.au

Dear GP colleagues

Invitation to join the Victorian Sentinel Practice Influenza Network (VicSPIN)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, general practices have played an integral role in keeping our communities safe; we cannot thank you enough for the hard work and dedication you have shown to protect your patients and staff, as well as your local communities during this challenging period.

When the number of cases in the community rose, responsibility for *en masse* testing of patients with respiratory viruses shifted from general practice to specialist testing hubs across the state.

As these testing hubs close, GP clinics will be vital to tracking the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses in the community.

Background

Notification of scheduled conditions under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act by medical practitioners and laboratories is the cornerstone of Victoria's passive disease surveillance system. These notifications help the state monitor and control cases and outbreaks of public health importance, including influenza, measles, salmonellosis, and COVID-19.

Sentinel surveillance can augment the data collected through passive surveillance to track the spread of disease in the community. VicSPIN is a sentinel primary care surveillance program which is delivered via our surveillance partner, Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory (VIDRL) at the Doherty Institute. It has been used for many years to monitor seasonal respiratory activity, which as of this year, is expanding to include COVID-19.

VicSPIN provides the Department of Health with important and timely data relating to respiratory disease activity in our community. These data help us detect the start of respiratory epidemics and how they compare across years, the spread of disease through our communities and the pathogens causing illness. Data collected under this program are

also used to evaluate the effectiveness of vaccines. All the intelligence generated via VicSPIN informs our public health response and helps to protect Victorians.

How to get involved

We can't expand this program without your support. **We need to draw on your local experience to help track the spread of respiratory illness in our community, for this flu season and beyond.**

The connections you have to your community will be integral to our disease surveillance and will help shape our public health response into the future. You can support the program by providing data through efficient collection of information from patients in your community who are presenting with respiratory symptoms.

There are Category 1 and Category 2 RACGP and ACCRM QI&CPD points available to you for participation, and the Department is working on new and innovative ways to support GP participants as we move into the next phase of the COVID-19 response. Further to this, participating GP clinics will receive access to a free, timely, full respiratory virus PCR diagnostic service via VIDRL.

Further information

To find out more information, and to sign up, please contact the VicSPIN team by email at vicspin@vidrl.org.au or violeta.spirkosa@unimelb.edu.au. You can also call the team on 0401 627 407.

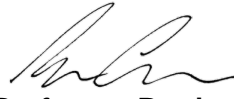
Thank you for your continued dedication and support to your local communities, and for playing your part in protecting the health and wellbeing of Victorians.

Yours sincerely,



Adj Clin Prof Brett Sutton
Chief Health Officer
Department of Health

05 / 08 / 2022



Professor Benjamin Cowie
Acting Chief Health Officer
Department of Health

05 / 08 / 2022