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Massachusetts Public Health Officials Urge Vaccinations for Flu and COVID-19 as Flu Season Begins

BOSTON (October 14, 2022) – With flu season underway, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is urging residents to get their flu shot and get a COVID-19 vaccine or booster for which they are eligible.

October is an ideal time to get a flu vaccine before the flu season reaches its peak. Every person over the age of 6 months is recommended to get a flu shot annually. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that people 65 years and older get a [high-dose flu vaccine](#) this season. Individuals can receive flu and COVID-19 vaccines in the same visit, including from many retail pharmacies. Both the COVID-19 and flu vaccines are safe and effective, and have been shown to reduce the risk of serious illness, hospitalization, and death.

“Every flu season is different, and while it is difficult to predict severity, vaccination remains the best way for people to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their communities against flu,” **said Public Health Commissioner Margret Cooke**. “Now is also a good time for residents to get their COVID-19 vaccines and updated bivalent booster if they haven’t yet, particularly those who are at increased risk of developing serious illness. This includes people with certain chronic health conditions.”

DPH began its statewide surveillance reporting for the 2022-2023 flu season the first week of October. Beginning today, October 14, weekly [data](#) will be reported every Friday, including metrics measuring the severity of influenza-like illness, hospital visits, and flu-related hospitalizations across Massachusetts. Since October 2, 96 lab-confirmed flu cases have been reported in Massachusetts. The majority of individuals with influenza-like illness are not tested; therefore, the number of positive test results does not reflect the total number of influenza cases in Massachusetts.

Federal public health officials are expecting higher flu activity this season as compared to the previous years based upon the high number of cases recorded this past winter in the Southern Hemisphere, particularly in Australia.

The flu can be very serious. Nearly every year in the United States, millions of people get the flu, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized, and thousands die from flu-related illnesses. The most common [symptoms of flu](#) are fever, cough, and sore throat. Symptoms can also include body aches, headaches, chills, runny nose, and fatigue.

Flu vaccination is especially important for people who are at higher risk of developing serious flu complications, such as those with a chronic respiratory condition, heart disease, a weakened immune system, or who are pregnant. Because flu and COVID-19 are both expected to be circulating this fall, and may have similar symptoms, people with flu-like illness should get tested for both COVID and flu.

COVID and flu vaccines are both widely available for everyone 6 months and older. Other [actions that people can take](#) to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like flu and COVID-19 include staying home when sick, covering coughs and sneezes, and practicing good hand hygiene.

“It’s important that everybody over the age of 6 months get a flu vaccine annually, and even more so this year because the lack of infection over the past couple of flu seasons likely means there is less immunity to flu than in prior years,” **said Dr. Larry Madoff, Medical Director of DPH’s Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences.** “The flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine or booster can be given during the same visit. We really urge people to get vaccinated to protect themselves, those around them, and to help prevent the circulation of flu on top of COVID, which could cause a strain on our health care system.”

DPH has launched a new seasonal flu [public awareness campaign](#) for television, online, and on billboards across the state encouraging residents to get vaccinated against the flu and COVID-19 to keep themselves, their family, and community healthy. People who have questions about getting both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines during the same visit should speak with a health care provider. [See more information on how to find a flu and/or COVID-19 vaccine site near you.](#)

For more information on COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, visit mass.gov/covid19. For more information about influenza, visit mass.gov/influenza or call your health care provider, local board of health, or DPH at (617) 983-6800.

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