

82 confirmed flu cases reported in Massachusetts

With the arrival of flu season in Massachusetts, the Department of Public Health (DPH) urges people to get vaccinated now to protect themselves, their families, and prevent the spread of flu.

On Friday, October 4th, DPH began Massachusetts' flu surveillance monitoring and reporting for the 2019-2020 flu season. Since the start of September, 82 lab-confirmed flu cases have been reported in Massachusetts. The number of cases is within the expected range for this time of year.

"We don't know how severe this year's flu season will be, but we do know that the flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself, your family, and everyone around you," said Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH. "Although the flu vaccine won't prevent every case of the flu, it's still the most effective way to reduce your risk of serious illness."

DPH recommends that you:

Get a flu vaccine as soon as possible. The flu vaccine is widely available across the state, including at health care provider offices, pharmacies, school and workplace vaccination clinics, and flu vaccine clinics sponsored by local boards of health. A list of flu vaccine availability based on zip code can be found at <https://vaccinefinder.org/>.

Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, and use hand sanitizer when washing is not possible.

Always cover your cough, and sneeze into your sleeve – not your hands.

Stay home when you are sick with fever and a cough or sore throat, and keep children home from school and daycare when they are sick.

Contact your healthcare provider promptly if you think you have the flu, especially if you have health conditions that make you more likely to develop severe illness when sick with the flu. The provider may prescribe antiviral medications, which work best when started early in the course of illness.

“In Massachusetts, 81 percent of children ages 6 months through 17 years had a flu vaccination last year, making our flu vaccination rates among children and adolescents among the highest in the nation,” said Dr. Larry Madoff, Medical Director of the DPH Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences. “But we need people of all ages to be vaccinated to help protect friends and family members from getting flu.”

Flu can be very serious. 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, headache, chills, runny nose, and fatigue.

Some people are at higher risk of serious health problems when they get flu, including pregnant women, infants, older adults, and people with medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, neurological and neuromuscular conditions, and weakened immune systems.

Flu vaccination reduces the risk of flu-associated death by half among children with underlying high-risk medical conditions and by nearly two-thirds among healthy children. Nationwide, there were 136 pediatric deaths from flu last year.

For more information about influenza, visit www.mass.gov/flu, or call your health care provider, local board of health, or DPH at (617) 983-6800.