

# City of New Bedford Health Department makes available seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccines

"The New Bedford Health Department is making influenza (flu) and COVID-19 vaccines available ahead of the holiday season.

Everyone 6 months and older is eligible for an updated 2023-24 COVID-19 vaccine and a seasonal flu vaccine. Contact the Health Department at 508-991-6199 to make an appointment or for more information. The Health Department is located in the Quest Center, 1213 Purchase St.

## Flu Vaccines

The Health Department offers standard and high-dose flu vaccines onsite by appointment.

The Health Department also can visit homebound residents to give a flu shot, by appointment. Flu shots are free with an insurance card and \$10 without an insurance card.

Call the Health Department Monday-Friday between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. to schedule an appointment. Local pharmacies offering the influenza vaccine can be located by entering your zip code at [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

For additional information:

- Key Facts about Influenza (Flu) and Flu Vaccine
- Visit [Flu.gov](https://www.flu.gov)

## COVID Vaccines

COVID-19 vaccines are available to nearly all Massachusetts residents for little or no cost.

The Health Department offers the vaccine to qualifying individuals without insurance through the Massachusetts COVID-19 Vaccine Bridge Access Program. On-site and in-home appointments are available by calling the City Health Department.

Local pharmacies offering COVID-19 vaccines can be found by entering your zip code at [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

Additionally, homebound individuals can request an in-home vaccine appointment through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at (833) 983-0485 or online at MDPH CV-19 In-Home Vaccination Program.

For information about COVID-19 and influenza transmission in Massachusetts, visit [MA Respiratory Illness Reporting](#)."-City of New Bedford.

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## **Southcoast Health and Providence College Student Athletes Encourage New Bedford / Fall River Children at the Boys & Girls Clubs**

Southcoast Health recently teamed up with Providence College student athletes, Bryce Hopkins, a junior small forward and pre-season All-American on the Providence College Friar men's basketball team, and Grace Efosa, a senior point guard on the Providence College Friar women's basketball team, to visit the local Boys & Girls Clubs in New Bedford and Fall River.

“It was extremely heartwarming to see Southcoast Health and Providence College investing in our community and providing our children with an unforgettable experience,” said Bill Kiley, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Fall River. “Bryce and Grace are showing these children that the sky is the limit, and that with hard work and dedication, anything is possible.”

Bryce Hopkins and Grace Efosa have both demonstrated exceptional dedication and strength on and off the basketball court and are excited to collaborate with Southcoast Health to inspire our communities’ next generation of leaders. Highlights from the visit included friendly games of basketball played between the children and the athletes, followed by photos with the athletes and autograph signings that will be sure to leave a lasting impression for years to come.

“We are incredibly thankful to both Southcoast Health and Providence College for bringing these world-class athletes to spend time with our kids. Bryce and Grace are the type of role models our children look up to, and we are so grateful for the positive impact they have left,” said Robbie Mendes, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater New Bedford.

At the event, Bryce spoke on the importance of surrounding oneself with good company and role models, while Grace shared her inspiring story of overcoming multiple significant injuries and getting back on the court, stronger and better than ever.

“I am so proud to see these two organizations working together to inspire and encourage the local youth,” Dr. Joseph Lifrak, an Orthopedic Surgeon at Southcoast Health and a member of the Providence Friars Medical Staff. “With the college basketball season kicking off on Monday, it is exciting to see the kids interact with the players and understand the importance of developing healthy habits on and off the court. In my

experience working with Grace and Bryce, we couldn't ask for better role models."

In addition to highlighting the value and importance of education, physical and mental health and overall wellness, Southcoast Health and these exceptional athletes from Providence College hope to inspire and nurture the youth in our local communities.

The Providence College Friars Men's Basketball schedule kicks off on Monday, November 6 and the Women's Basketball schedule kicks off on Tuesday, November 7 with back to back home games.

To learn more about Sports Medicine at Southcoast Health please visit [Sports Medicine Services MA & RI | Southcoast Health](#).

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## **Southcoast Health now accepting proposals for 2023 Access to Technology Mini Grant Program**

Southcoast Health is now accepting submissions for the 2023 Access to Technology Mini Grant Program until 5 pm on Wednesday, November 22. The funds from this program provide organizations with monetary support to invest in improving the access to and knowledge of technology within the region.

This program is made possible by the Southcoast Health Digital Health Services (DHS) hardware decommission and recycling initiative, which started in 2019.

“At Southcoast Health, we are committed to investing in community benefits that extend beyond direct patient care,” said Jim Feen, Senior Vice President, Chief Digital & Information Officer at Southcoast Health. “Through our commitment to routinely investing and staying current with the state-of-the-art technologies that run Southcoast Health and enable exceptional care, we developed a hardware decommission and recycling initiative to safely and securely dispose of outdated equipment.”

This initiative recognizes that old computers and outdated hardware devices can be securely repurposed by recycling them and selling the useful parts while ensuring privacy and data protection by shredding the aged hard drives. While Southcoast Health is unable to donate these items outright, to ensure all data is securely eliminated, the funds from the secure recycling program are offered to community partners to support new technology investments.

“The intent of the grant program is to re-distribute funds received from our hardware decommission and recycling initiative back into the community. Overall this will help support the ever-growing technology needs of local community programs who will benefit from this important support,” said Feen.

This grant is also supported by the Southcoast CARES program, which works to address the most pressing health and social needs of our region with a focus on health equity. In the most recent report, for the 2022 fiscal year, Southcoast Health invested over \$23.6 million in community benefits activities, including charity care, hospital and community-based programs, and collaboration with regional health centers and health and human service agencies.

“As a not-for-profit, community-based healthcare system, we are committed to reaching beyond our walls to partner with organizations that help our community thrive. We are honored

to be able to help build technology infrastructure for our partners, which can facilitate their ability to serve our community, share data, and more,” said Ali LeBert, Manager of Community Health and Wellness for Southcoast Health.

For more information about this program, please visit [Community Funding Opportunities | Southcoast Health](#)

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# **Massachusetts Public Health Officials Urge Residents to Get Vaccinated Ahead of the Holiday Season**

As the weather gets colder and with holiday gatherings just around the corner, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) urges residents to get vaccinated.

“With Thanksgiving just two weeks away, now is a great time for those preparing to celebrate with friends and loved ones to get vaccinated for flu, COVID-19, and RSV, if eligible. Getting vaccinated now will maximize protection against these respiratory viruses,” said Public Health Commissioner Robert Goldstein, MD, PhD. “We want Massachusetts residents to have a safe, healthy, and fun holiday season and part of that is getting vaccinated to protect yourself and those around you.”

Everyone 6 months and older should get a seasonal flu vaccine and an updated COVID-19 vaccine, both of which can take up to two weeks to take full effect to protect against infection, serious illness and hospitalization, and reduce the chances of suffering the effects of Long COVID. The updated COVID-19

vaccine is effective against current variants and widely available for little or no cost to Massachusetts residents. Vaccine location information is available at [mass.gov/CovidVaccine](https://mass.gov/CovidVaccine). Residents who cannot get to a vaccination location can schedule an appointment for in-home COVID and flu vaccination by going to [mass.gov/VaccinesAtHome](https://mass.gov/VaccinesAtHome) or calling 833-983-0485.

DPH is working with hospitals and providers to encourage vaccination of staff and patients. Through its Vaccine Equity Initiative, DPH is working closely with communities of color and other populations and communities hardest-hit by COVID-19 to improve access to vaccination. Through partnerships with community organizations, DPH will hold COVID-19 and flu clinics in many community locations and at upcoming cultural events. A listing of these community clinics that are accepting appointments and, in some locations, walk-ins, is updated weekly and can be found at [mass.gov/MobileVax](https://mass.gov/MobileVax).

In addition to flu and COVID-19 vaccination, many people are eligible for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccination this year, including pregnant people, newborns, and many people 60 and older. COVID-19, flu, and RSV are the three viruses that are most likely to cause severe disease resulting in hospitalization and sometimes death.

While the holidays are a time for gathering, public health officials advise that if you are feeling unwell, you should stay home, get tested, and, if you test positive for flu or COVID-19, get treatment to prevent the spread of illness.

“Adding vaccinations to your holiday season to-do list is one of the best gifts you can give yourself and people you’ll gather with, especially older adults, people who are immunocompromised, and pregnant people, who are at higher risk for severe complications,” said State Epidemiologist Dr. Catherine Brown. “While it’s never too late to get your COVID or flu shots, getting vaccinated sooner rather than later will provide increased protection ahead of holiday celebrations,

the start of winter, and peak respiratory disease season.”

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## **New Bedford’s Buttonwood Park receives \$2 million “to improve water quality” of brook and pond**

New Bedford, MA – Mayor Jon Mitchell announced that the City, along with local, state, and federal partners, is launching a major effort to improve water quality in Buttonwood Brook and Pond.

More than \$2 million in state and federal funds has been secured for the project, which aims to better manage stormwater to reduce pollution in the Buttonwood Brook ecosystem.

“This project will have a lasting positive impact on the ecological health of Buttonwood Park,” said Mayor Jon Mitchell. “I want to thank our federal delegation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Coalition of Buzzards Bay, and the Healey Administration for their support of this critical green infrastructure initiative.”

Environmental infrastructure improvements are planned for the northern end of Brownell Avenue, Kempton Street near the Route 140 intersection, and around the Buttonwood Warming House. They include rain gardens, retention ponds and bioswales, which will capture stormwater and allow it to filter and clean, keeping street pollutants from reaching the brook and pond.



Capturing and filtering stormwater will help Buttonwood Brook absorb heavy rains and reduce the chance of flooding. The Brook runs 8.5 miles, from Hathaway Road south through Buttonwood Pond and eventually emptying into Apponagansett Bay in south Dartmouth, passing through many residential areas along the way.

The parking lot for the Warming House will be repaved, and the walkways will be brought up to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. The City worked with the Buzzards Bay Coalition and the Town of Dartmouth to plan and secure funding for the project.

**Funding sources include:**

- A \$500,000 Watershed Implementation Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Southeast New England Program to the Buzzards Bay Coalition, which accepted the award at Wednesday's ceremony.
- A \$350,000 grant from the state's Municipal Vulnerability Program to the City.
- A \$375,000 grant from the EPA's National Estuary Program to the City's Department of Parks, Recreation and Beaches.
- Almost \$710,000 in American Rescue Plan funds from the federal government.

"This project, which will protect our watershed and improve access for all who visit Buttonwood Park, is a reminder of what can happen when the local, state, and federal government partner with each other and with non-profit organizations like the Buzzards Bay Coalition," said Congressman Bill Keating. "I'm proud of the work that the Southeast New England Program has accomplished since Senator Jack Reed and I worked together to start the program a decade ago, and I am proud to see this increased federal investment in the City of New Bedford as a result of President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the American Rescue Plan."

“Massachusetts’ senior elected officials continue to do a fantastic job crafting great solutions for the challenges facing our coastal waters – and this funding is a result of their hard work and creativity,” said EPA New England Regional Administrator David W. Cash. “These projects announced today will advance EPA’s and the Commonwealth’s commitment to investing in underserved communities.”

“This project will not only improve the water quality in Buttonwood Brook and Pond, but it will keep the Buttonwood ecosystem healthy and thriving for years to come,” said Ward 5 City Councilor Scott Lima. “This is a good example of the good that comes when local, state, and federal bodies come together as a team.”

“Climate change impacts like sea-level rise and increased rainfall require innovative approaches,” said Commissioner Bonnie Heiple of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. “We applaud the collaboration that led to the use of nature-based solutions to improve water quality and reduce flooding risks to the New Bedford community.”

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## **Legislators sponsor bill to put an end to “Daylight Savings” in Massachusetts**

Winter is approaching and soon the clocks will be “falling back” as the weather progressively gets colder. In Massachusetts we can adjust to the cold air while still ordering our Dunkin iced coffee, but 4:30pm sunsets? Those are rough.

While we can't control the weather, some Massachusetts officials are making a push to abolish the time change which would keep Massachusetts permanently on Atlantic standard time.

Bill H.3051 which is led by Representative Vanna Howard of Lowell, was heard by the the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight on Tuesday afternoon.

Part of the bills clarifies that this can only take effect "if two or more of the following states: New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York or Maine (i) enact an agreement adopting Atlantic standard time with the commonwealth".

It will then have to be passed in the house, passed in the senate, and signed into law.

Many people claim they get "seasonal depression" once the clocks fall back, which is a major reason behind the push for change. This is known clinically as "Seasonal affective disorder", which according to John Hopkins Medicine, "the shorter days and less daylight may trigger a chemical change in the brain leading to symptoms of depression".

If you are dreading those long winter nights, try getting a "Happy Light" online, it sounds funny be these therapy lights actually work great, I have one myself!



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## **New Bedford's Pulaski, Congdon School students to participate in 10-day sleep challenge**

"As part of Student Sleep Health Week (September 17-23), two elementary schools – Pulaski and Congdon – will participate in a 10-day sleep challenge developed by Dr. Kathleen Mackenzie, Supervisor of Clinical and Behavioral Services in collaboration with New Bedford Cable Access. "With the return to school in its third week and as schedules become routine, this is a great time for students and families to focus their attention on getting quality sleep. It is critical for overall well-being, and is linked to positive outcomes in learning, development and physical/mental health," notes Dr. Mackenzie.

Andrew O'Leary, Interim Superintendent, notes the importance of balancing screen time and sleep. "The way our students consume media is very similar to those habits, good or bad, in their nutrition and exercise. If a rested mind learns best we must all do more to encourage healthy screen-time habits and ensure our children get sufficient sleep for their age and activity level."

Students start the challenge by taking an anonymous survey about their sleep habits and watch a brief introductory video produced by New Bedford Cable Access with Dr. Mackenzie. Each day, they look at a slide to discuss a Question of the Day and watch a short video response, which provides a suggestion they can try to improve their sleep. They record their sleep in a daily log. At the end of 10 days, they take a post-challenge survey (also anonymous). This process of discussing and self-monitoring sleep health with peers and counselors creates greater awareness and understanding of sleep as a big part of being the best one can be.

Developed two years ago, the sleep challenge seeks to educate staff, students, and families about the importance of sleep, and as a way to support student mental health. Students at the middle and high school level have participated in the sleep challenge in the past and students reported positive changes in their level of happiness, stress, and overall well-being.

This year the RISE Academy program at Pulaski School is incorporating the 10-day sleep challenge into their social-emotional learning blocks taught daily in the classroom by school adjustment counselors. RISE (Reaching Independence through Supportive Education) facilitates intensive social-emotional/behavioral and academic interventions.

Jarred Varao, Supervisor for the RISE program states, "We put social-emotional learning at the forefront of everything we do. RISE teaches skills to promote self-regulation and builds a love for learning that helps foster academic growth and

success. Healthy sleep habits are a critical component.”

In preparation for the sleep challenge, RISE lead behaviorist Kevin Gifford said, “We are excited to embark on this journey and partner with Dr. Mackenzie to support our students, families and staff. Our dedicated behavioral staff will also be participating, looking at their own sleep patterns. With this knowledge we can work together to create an environment that prioritizes healthy sleep habits and ultimately enhances our learning community.”

Since not all schools are able to participate in the challenge at this time, Dr. Mackenzie will offer an informational session via Zoom on Tuesday, September 26, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. To register: <https://bit.ly/NBPSSleepHealth>. The session is for parents, guardians and caregivers who would like to learn about several science-based strategies to get their children and family members sleeping better now.”

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## **Massachusetts health officials announce season's first EEE-positive mosquito samples**

“The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced that Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) virus has been detected in mosquitoes in Massachusetts for the first time this year. The presence of EEE was confirmed today by the Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory in mosquito samples collected on August 30 in Douglas and Southbridge in Worcester County. No human or animal cases of EEE have been

detected so far this year.

Today's finding increases the risk level of EEE to moderate in the communities of Douglas, Dudley, Southbridge, Sturbridge, Uxbridge, and Webster in Worcester County.

"After the EEE outbreak cycle that occurred in 2019 and 2020, there was no EEE activity in Massachusetts in 2021 or 2022," said Public Health Commissioner Robert Goldstein, MD, PhD. "This is a late season emergence for EEE which should keep the risk level from rising too much or too quickly. However, some risk from mosquito-borne disease will continue until the first hard frost and people should take steps to prevent mosquito bites."

EEE is a rare but serious and potentially fatal disease that can affect people of all ages. EEE is generally spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. There were 12 human cases of EEE in Massachusetts in 2019 with six deaths and five human cases with one death in 2020. There were no human cases of EEE in Massachusetts in 2021 or 2022.

"Transmission of EEE to a person late in the season can happen," said Dr. Catherine M. Brown, State Epidemiologist. "Mosquitoes will be more active during warm and humid weather as we are forecast to have this weekend. I encourage everyone to use mosquito repellent when they are outdoors enjoying the last unofficial weekend of summer; you can also use clothing to cover exposed skin and if you notice that you are getting bitten, you should consider moving indoors."

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# **First two human cases of West Nile virus hit Massachusetts; parts of state on high-alert**

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced the first two human cases of West Nile virus (WNV) in state residents this year. One individual is a female in her 70s who was exposed to the virus in another part of the country. The second individual is a male in his 40s who was exposed in Middlesex County, an area already known to be at moderate risk.

The risk of human infection with WNV is moderate in the Greater Boston area (Middlesex, Norfolk, and Suffolk counties), and in parts of Berkshire, Bristol, Hampden, Hampshire, Plymouth, and Worcester counties. There are no additional risk level changes indicated at this time.

“This is the first time that West Nile virus infection has been identified in Massachusetts residents this year,” said Public Health Commissioner Robert Goldstein, MD, PhD. “August and September are the months when most people are exposed to West Nile virus in Massachusetts. Populations of mosquitoes that can carry and spread this virus are fairly large this year and we have seen recent increases in the number of WNV-positive mosquito samples from multiple parts of the Commonwealth.”

In 2022, there were eight human cases of WNV infection identified in Massachusetts. WNV is usually transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. While WNV can infect people of all ages, people over the age of 50 are at higher risk for severe disease. Most people infected with WNV will have no symptoms. When present, WNV symptoms tend to include fever and flu-like illness. In rare cases, more severe



illness can occur.

“We are coming to the unofficial end of summer but mosquitoes with West Nile virus will persist for several more months,” said Dr. Catherine M. Brown, State Epidemiologist. “To avoid mosquito bites, use a repellent with an EPA-registered ingredient, wear clothing to reduce exposed skin, drain standing water and repair window screens. We also encourage everyone to regularly visit DPH’s mosquito-borne diseases web pages to stay informed on when and where WNV activity is occurring.”

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## **Massachusetts could lose \$628 million, or 76% of Medicaid funding**

By Michael P. Norton  
State House News Service

Massachusetts hospitals that serve disproportionate numbers of patients on Medicaid or who lack health insurance are pressing to block or delay nearly \$630 million in federal funding cuts that were originally enacted in 2010 as part of the Affordable Care Act.

The cuts, which have been delayed several times, are currently set to kick in on Oct. 1, according to the Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association, and would come as Gov. Maura Healey and the Legislature just agreed this month on \$180 million in state aid to be delivered to financially stressed hospitals.

The cuts would total \$8 billion annually across the country from fiscal years 2024 through 2027, the association said, with Massachusetts standing to be among the hardest hit states because of a formula requiring the largest percentage of cuts be applied to the states with the highest percentage of insured individuals.

Massachusetts could lose \$628.6 million, or 76 percent of its current Medicaid funding for “disproportionate share” hospitals, the MHA said, citing Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission estimates and warning that “significant harm will occur if the scheduled Medicaid DSH cuts are not stopped.”

Pending legislation known as the PATIENT Act includes a section that would eliminate the scheduled cuts for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

In an Aug. 4 letter to U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, more than half the members of that branch, including Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey, wrote that required funding reductions were tethered to the Affordable Care Act’s goal of increasing health insurance coverage so that hospitals would no longer need the additional payments, which date back as far as 1981, to offset uncompensated care costs.

“Those coverage levels have not been fully realized yet these hospitals continue to care for uninsured and underinsured patients,” the senators wrote in their letter, which the hospital association drew attention to in its Monday Report.

They added, “The Medicaid DSH program keeps many hospitals financially viable and able to provide care to vulnerable individuals. Drastic cuts to this program could lead to a reduction in access to care for those who need it most.”