Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health Urges Flu and COVID-19 Vaccinations as Flu Season Arrives

With the arrival of flu season in Massachusetts, the Department of Public Health (DPH) urges residents to get vaccinated now to protect themselves, their families, and prevent the spread of flu, as well as ease the burden of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses on the health care system. Every person over the age of 6 months is recommended to get a flu shot every year.

On Friday, October 15, DPH began its statewide surveillance reporting for the 2021-2022 flu season. Weekly data will be reported every Friday on the severity of influenza-like illness, hospital visits, and flu-related hospitalizations across Massachusetts. Since September 1, 37 lab-confirmed flu cases have been reported in Massachusetts. The number of cases is within the expected range for this time of year.

"While we cannot predict the severity of this flu season, as in every season, flu vaccination remains the best way for people to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their communities against flu, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness and people with certain chronic health conditions,'' said Acting Public Health Commissioner Margret Cooke. "For residents who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 or need a booster shot, now is also a good time to get the COVID-19 vaccination."

Flu activity this season is predicted to be higher compared to last season, given that flu activity was uncharacteristically low amid COVID-19 mitigation measures, such as stay-at-home

advisories and mask mandates.

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, for example people with a chronic respiratory condition, heart disease, a weakened immune system, and pregnant women. Because flu and COVID-19 may both be circulating this fall, and may have similar symptoms, people with flu-like illness should get tested for COVID and those at higher risk for flu complications should also get tested for flu. There is antiviral treatment available for flu and individuals at higher risk should call their health care provider to discuss treatment.

"A flu vaccine and a COVID-19 vaccine can be given at the same time,'' said Dr. Larry Madoff, Medical Director of the DPH Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences. "Whether you are getting your first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine or are eligible to receive a booster shot of COVID-19 vaccine, we encourage you to get a flu vaccine during the same visit.''

People who have questions about getting both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines during the same visit should speak with a health care provider.

For more information about influenza, visit Influenza | Mass.gov or call your health care provider, local board of health, or DPH at (617) 983-6800.