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PRESS RELEASE

Baker-Polito Administration Urges Massachusetts Residents to Get Flu Vaccination

Flu season to overlap with ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, increased flu vaccinations will help preserve healthcare resources

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Department of Public Health

MEDIA CONTACT

Tory Mazzola, COVID-19 Command Center

Online

Tory.Mazzola@mass.gov (mailto:Tory.Mazzola@mass.gov)



BOSTON — The Baker-Polito Administration today urged residents to get vaccinated now against influenza to protect themselves, their families, and prevent the spread of flu to keep residents healthy and ease the strain on healthcare systems caring for people with COVID-19.

“It is more important than ever for people to get a flu shot this year as we deal with the COVID-19 pandemic,” **Governor Charlie Baker said.** “If more people are vaccinated against the flu, this will not only help reduce the spread of flu but also the impact of flu-related illness on healthcare facilities, resources and staff involved in the treatment of COVID patients.”

“All residents of Massachusetts should get a flu vaccine this year to help lessen the burden on the Commonwealth’s health care system as we continue to respond to COVID-19,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.** “Getting a flu shot is one way residents can protect themselves, their loved ones and their communities in the months ahead.”

Today Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito, and Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders visited a CVS Pharmacy in Roslindale to receive flu shots and highlight the importance of getting vaccinated this year. CVS also **announced today**

<https://www.cvshealth.com/news-and-insights/press-releases/cvs-health-plans-to-double-its-covid-19-drive-thru-test-sites-to-a> it is expanding COVID-19 testing sites at several of its locations across Massachusetts beginning tomorrow.

Last month, the Baker-Polito Administration announced **a requirement** [\(/news/flu-vaccine-now-required-for-all-massachusetts-school-students-enrolled-in-child-care-pre\)](/news/flu-vaccine-now-required-for-all-massachusetts-school-students-enrolled-in-child-care-pre) that all students attending kindergarten through college must have a flu immunization by December 31. The requirement also applies to children over six months of age attending child care. Exemptions may be made for medical or religious reasons.

In addition, the state adopted a policy, based on the federal PREP Act, which enables qualified pharmacy staff to administer a flu shot to children as young as three years old. The previous minimum age in Massachusetts was nine.

“This season we have focused efforts to obtain additional flu vaccines because of the new school policy for students and knowing this flu season overlaps with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,” **said Secretary Sudders**. “We encourage everyone over six months to get a flu shot as soon as possible.”



“We know our patients and customers throughout the Commonwealth are doing everything they can to keep their families as healthy as possible, while minimizing potential exposure to the flu and COVID-19,” **said Dr. David Fairchild, Chief Medical Officer, MinuteClinic, and Associate Chief Medical Officer, CVS Health**. “We are pleased to be working with Governor Baker and his team to encourage people to get vaccinated before peak flu season as a great way to be proactive about their health and the health of our communities all across the state.”

Flu can be very serious. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that influenza has resulted in between 9 million – 45 million illnesses, between 140,000 – 810,000 hospitalizations and between 12,000 – 61,000 deaths annually since 2010. In Massachusetts, during the 2019-2020 flu season more than 40,000 confirmed cases were reported to the Department of Public Health (DPH), with 55,000-60,000 emergency department visits for flu, resulting in 7,000-8,000 hospitalizations. DPH will begin its annual flu surveillance reporting for the 2020-2021 on October 9.

In anticipation of increased demand for flu shots this year, public health officials have been working to increase the vaccine supply. Over the past several years, DPH has purchased approximately 900,000 doses annually. This year the Commonwealth will receive 1,156,000 doses, a 28 percent increase.

DPH recommends people:

- 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 vaccinefinder.org (<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 during the 2018-2019 flu season, 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.”

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 188 pediatric deaths from flu last year.

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

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Media Contact

Tory Mazzola, COVID-19 Command Center

Online

Tory.Mazzola@mass.gov (<mailto:Tory.Mazzola@mass.gov>)

Ann Scales, Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Online

Ann.Scales@mass.gov (mailto:Ann.Scales@mass.gov)

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

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