

# Facts about Influenza

## (Also known as the “Flu”)

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu virus. There is no cure for the flu, but you can protect yourself, your family, and your patients from the flu by doing the following:

- **Get a flu vaccine:** Many health departments in your city/town offer the vaccine free of charge. Contact your local health department or find the nearest flu clinic in your area at by visiting: <http://flu.masspro.org/clinic/>.
- **Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs:** Remember to wash your hands often with soap and water and cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Take flu medicine if your doctor prescribes them:** Doctors may prescribe medication (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder known as antiviral drugs) that are not available over-the-counter.

### How does the flu spread?

The main way that flu virus spread is from person to person. Flu virus spread through droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. Flu virus may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands. It can cause you to be sick, and at times can lead to hospitalizations and death.

### What are symptoms of the flu?

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

### The Flu and You

#### How the flu affects the Hispanic/Latino community

Last year's H1N1 flu season affected the Hispanic/Latino community unequally in Massachusetts. Below are some facts about how the seasonal and H1N1 flu are continuing to affect Hispanic/Latinos in comparison to their white counterparts:

-- **More likely to get the flu:** Hispanic/ Latinos are 2 to 4 times more likely to get the flu

-- **More likely to be hospitalized for the flu:** Hispanic/ Latinos are hospitalized 3 times more often

-- **More death rates from the flu:** Hispanic/ Latinos are 6 times more likely to die from the flu

-- **Lower vaccination rates:** For H1N1 flu, Hispanic/ Latino adults were 11.5% less likely to be vaccinated (although children were 5.5% more likely to be vaccinated). For seasonal flu, Hispanic/ Latinos adults were 21.7% while children were 2.6% less likely to be vaccinated

You can prevent the flu by washing your hands regularly, covering your coughs or sneezes and getting vaccinated every year. Contact your local health department today for your free flu vaccine.

**Source:** Massachusetts Department of Public Health website

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### What are complications of the flu?

Most people who get the flu will get better in a few days to less than 2 weeks, but some people will develop additional health problems (such as pneumonia) as a result of the flu, some of which can be life-threatening and result in death.

Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are three examples of complications from the flu. The flu can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with heart problems may have worsening conditions that is triggered by the flu.



### Who is at higher risk from flu?

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems from the flu can happen at any age, but some people are at higher risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. This includes people 65 years and older, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), pregnant women, and young children are more likely to experience additional health problems from influenza.

### How can I prevent the flu?

One of the most effective ways to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated. **Medical experts recommend that everyone 6 months or over should be vaccinated this season.** The 2010-11 flu vaccine provides protection against the three main flu virus that the medical community identified will cause the most illness this season.

### What should I do if I get sick?

If you get sick with the flu, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except when seeking medical care. Most people are able to recover at home from flu without medical care.

For more flu information, visit Massachusetts Emergency Preparedness Region 4b's website at [www.region4b.org/Spotlight\\_Flu.aspx](http://www.region4b.org/Spotlight_Flu.aspx) or the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's flu website at [www.mass.gov/flu](http://www.mass.gov/flu) or their flu hotline at (866) 627-7968.