

## Health Service News

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### Influenza information from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health:

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## Influenza is Beginning to Rise in Massachusetts

### Health Officials Stress the Importance of Vaccination, Handwashing, Covering your Cough, and Staying Home If You're Sick.

**BOSTON** — After a relatively mild flu season so far, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) announced today that influenza activity is beginning to increase across the state. The timing is not unusual — flu season usually peaks in February or early March. Flu activity is starting to increase [across the country as well](#).

The best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated. Over 3 million doses of influenza vaccine have been distributed during the 2008-2009 influenza season, including 808,000 doses of state-supplied vaccine. Contact your healthcare provider if you are interested in getting a flu shot.

The increase in influenza activity and the resistance to medications that treat the influenza illness makes it all that much more important to take measures to protect yourself, co-workers, friends and family. Key measures are:

- **Handwashing:** To avoid getting the flu, [handwashing](#) is very important, as well as avoiding close contact with those who are ill.

- **Covering your cough:** Sick or well, always cover your cough — use your arm to stifle a cough, not your hand.
- **Stay home from work or school if you are sick.**

## Flu Activity Nationwide and in Mass.

For the week ending January 24, 2009, two states reported widespread influenza activity and 14 states, including Massachusetts and four other New England states, reported regional activity. Of those influenza viruses of a known type, 81% were influenza type A and 19% were influenza type B.

In Massachusetts, the number of laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza reported to DPH each week has risen consistently over the past three weeks, with a significant increase between the week ending January 17<sup>th</sup> and the week ending January 24<sup>th</sup>. Twelve specimens have been subtyped at the William A. Hinton State Laboratory Institute during the 2008-2009 season. Six of these specimens have been A/H1N1, five have been H3N2 and one was identified as type B.

## Resistance to Antivirals

The CDC recently announced that the predominant strain of influenza circulating nationally (influenza A H1N1) has developed resistance to a widely used antiviral medication, oseltamivir (Tamiflu®). Doctors often prescribe antiviral medications to treat the symptoms of people with the flu. While this particular antiviral medication has proven less effective against this year’s predominant flu strain, another antiviral called zanamavir (Relenza®) continues to be effective in treating flu symptoms.

Fortunately, this year’s flu vaccine is protective against the predominant strain circulating this year.

For complete information about surveillance for influenza in Massachusetts, go to [www.mass.gov/dph/flu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu), and click on Seasonal Flu, then Influenza Surveillance, and then Massachusetts Surveillance Data.

For general information on influenza in multiple languages, please visit the DPH flu webpage at [www.mass.gov/dph/flu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu), or see the “**Flu: What You Can Do**” informational campaign at [www.mass.gov/dph](http://www.mass.gov/dph).

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**Please note: the Wellesley College Health Service still has a small number of doses of flu vaccine remaining. Please contact the Health Service at x2810 or stop in for vaccination between 9am and 4pm, M-F.**