

What is Influenza?

A Fact Sheet

Influenza, or the "flu," is a common respiratory disease caused by a virus. Every year, the flu virus causes outbreaks in fall and winter. This is because each year, the flu virus changes a little so the protection, or immunity, our bodies have built up against previous viruses is not as effective.

The flu spreads easily from person to person through coughing and sneezing and hands touching your eyes, mouth or nose. Flu symptoms can appear suddenly and include a fever, cough, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, a runny nose and a sore throat. The worst symptoms usually last about five days, but coughing can last up to two to three weeks. Sometimes children with the flu can have nausea, vomiting or diarrhea.

Although colds and other viruses may cause similar symptoms, influenza weakens a person more than other viruses. About 20 per cent of persons infected will not have any symptoms. In others, symptoms can be mild to severe. However, if infected, very young children, people with some chronic medical conditions and the elderly are more likely than healthy older children or adults to get very sick, and may need to be hospitalized. People over 65 years are at the greatest risk of dying from the flu.

What Can YOU Do?

Stay Healthy – Avoid the Flu

- Wash your hands, often and thoroughly, with soap and warm water, or an alcohol-based lotion.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. This decreases the chance that you will infect yourself or others.
- Clean things at home, work or school that are touched often, like door or refrigerator handles, computer keyboards/mouse, phone and water faucets.
- Avoid physical contact with anyone who has cold or flu symptoms.

- Avoid large crowds and practice “social distancing” during contagious disease outbreaks. This is especially important for children, people who are chronically ill or with weakened immune systems, and their caregivers.
- Get an annual flu shot, even if you hear that the vaccine does not protect against bird flu. This is an easy and important way to take control of your own health. (A list of public clinics is available on line at flu.masspro.org)
- Ask your health care provider about getting a pneumococcal shot. You may need it if you are at high risk.

If You Get Sick

- When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth with a tissue or the inside of your elbow (NOT your hand if you can help it). Never cough in the direction of someone else.
- Stay home when you are ill. If you have flu symptoms, stay home from work or school and avoid public activities for at least 5 days (7 days for children) or until all symptoms disappear.
- Contact your doctor or primary health care provider if you have specific questions about yourself or your family members.

More information on what you can do is available on websites of the state and federal government at www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/epii/flu/flu1.htm and www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html

What Can Your Family Do?

Being prepared for emergencies like a pandemic, or severe weather, or a terrorist attack, is one of the best ways to protect yourself and your family. Preparation gives you control should threats occur.

Checklists to help your family to plan for different types of emergencies are available at the following websites:

- Town of Hudson www.townofhudson.org.com (Fire Department page contains information in .doc and .pdf formats for use by individuals, families, businesses, schools, and agencies)
- American Red Cross - www.redcross.org
- Mass. Dept. of Public Health www.mass.gov/samh/
- Mass. Emergency Management Agency (search for “MEMA” on www.mass.gov)
- U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html

- [US Dept of Homeland Security www.ready.gov/america/index.html](http://www.ready.gov/america/index.html)

Stay informed—Information Is Power

Additional information about possible threats and how to cope with these emergencies are available at the following Web sites:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency - www.fema.gov
- Mass. Dept. of Agricultural Resources - mass.gov/agr/animalhealth/bioterrorism/index.htm
- Mass. Medical Society - www.massmed.org
- Univ of Michigan Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy - www.cidrap.umn.edu
- USDHHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - www.bt.cdc.gov

Computers with Internet access are available for public use at the Hudson Public Library. Hudson Public Library is a good source of information about emergency planning and medical issues: www.hudsonpubliclibrary.com

What is Hudson Doing?

Hudson agencies have been preparing for a flu pandemic, including avian flu, by taking the following steps:

- Developing plans for Emergency Dispensing Sites for mass distribution and administration of vaccines and medications
- Developing Continuity of Operations Plans for the Hudson Board of Health to maintain essential public health operations during an emergency.
- Beginning the process of organizing our own Hudson Medical Reserve Corps to provide volunteers to help during an emergency. (Details on volunteer efforts are available at the Board of Health, Fire Department, or on the Town Web site, www.townofhudson.org.)
- Working with other cities and towns within the region to develop Regional Comprehensive Emergency Operations Plans
- Hudson is in the process of setting up pneumococcal vaccine clinics before next flu season for Hudson seniors and other high risk residents.
- Hudson Fire Department has launched a Public Awareness and Education Campaign to help individuals, businesses, families, schools, and agencies plan for a variety of emergency situations. The information is available on the Town's Web site in the Fire Department pages. Call 978-562-5565 for more details.