

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Urges: Protect Yourself and Your Community By Getting a Flu Shot

BOSTON, Oct. 5, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts](#) (Blue Cross) is supporting state and national public health experts in encouraging flu vaccinations. A severe flu outbreak this winter, coupled with a resurgence of the coronavirus, would pose a serious threat to individual and public health, as well as the health care system.



"We're facing the very real possibility of a 'twindemic' — two potentially deadly viruses circulating among us at the same time," said Dr. Katherine Dallow, VP and medical director of clinical programs and strategy at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. "While we don't yet have a vaccine for the coronavirus, you can reduce your risk of flu infection by getting vaccinated as soon as possible."

Vaccine coverage and access

Flu shots are available at no cost to Blue Cross members when administered by appropriate participating network clinicians.* Members can use the health plan's [Find-a-Doctor](#) tool to locate a flu shot provider, and should call ahead to check on the availability of the vaccine. If members need additional help finding a provider or have questions about coverage, they can reach a [TeamBlue](#) member service representative by calling the number on the front of their member ID card.

Any member of the public can use the national vaccine finder tool <https://vaccinefinder.org/> to find a clinician offering vaccines, including flu shots. People who use the vaccine finder should check with their health plan about coverage.

Impact of flu and vaccine's benefit

According to the latest published [data](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the 2018-2019 flu season resulted in almost half a million hospitalizations and more than 34,000 deaths nationally. The 2017-2018 season was even worse, with an estimated 810,000 hospitalizations and 61,000 deaths.

The flu vaccine is safe and [effective](#), reducing the risk of infection by 40% to 60% when the year's vaccine is a good match to the strain of flu virus circulating, according to the CDC. Even if the vaccine is not a good match, the flu shot can lessen the [severity](#) and duration of illness, helping to ensure that hospital beds are kept available for those who are critically ill.

"Getting vaccinated can prevent unnecessary emergency room visits and hospitalizations at a time when we need to make sure we have plenty of resources available to treat coronavirus patients — everything from basic hospital supplies and personal protective equipment to ICU beds and ventilators," Dallow said.

Protect the most vulnerable

For many Americans, the flu is an inconvenience, with symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches and fatigue — all of which are usually resolved with bed rest. But like coronavirus, it can lead to serious complications. Those younger than 5 or over 65, pregnant women, and people with asthma, heart disease, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, HIV/AIDS or undergoing cancer treatment are at much higher risk of critical illness and possibly death.

"It's especially critical this year that we do everything we can to protect the most vulnerable among us," said Dallow. "I encourage those who don't normally get a flu shot to reconsider and think about their loved ones and others they may come into contact with who are at high risk."

Dallow adds that since many of us are living in close contact with more people for longer stretches of time due to COVID restrictions — some with multiple generations in the same home — the risk of spreading viruses from the common cold to influenza to the coronavirus is even greater this fall and winter.

Other flu prevention tips

There are several simple steps you can take to help prevent the spread of flu and coronavirus:

- Stay home when feeling sick
- Frequently wash hands with soap and water and use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer in situations when hand washing isn't possible
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue or the crook of your arm when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of the tissue and immediately wash hands with soap and water.
- Stay at least six feet away from people who are coughing or sneezing
- Immediately wash hands after contact with an ill person
- Teach children good hygiene habits
- Frequently clean common surfaces
- Wear a mask when out in public

Resources

For more information about influenza and the flu vaccine, Blue Cross members can visit the [Flu Facts](#) page on the [MyBlue](#) website and app.

The company's news service, Coverage, also reports regularly on the flu and other health issues. Recent articles include:

- [Job No. 1 this fall: Get a flu shot](#)
- ['Getting vaccinated is a top priority for kids'](#)
- [Video: How vaccines work](#)

Readers can visit the [Coverage](#) homepage or [subscribe to the Coverage weekly e-newsletter](#) for health news.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (<https://www.mass.gov/influenza>) both track flu-related activity, and provide information on the virus, vaccinations, and how to protect yourself from getting sick.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to the relentless pursuit of quality, affordable health care *with* an unparalleled consumer experience. Consistent with our promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

**Members should always check their plan documents to confirm benefits and coverage*



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