



TOWN OF WESTFORD
Health Department
TOWN HALL (Second Floor)
55 Main Street
WESTFORD, MASSACHUSETTS 01886
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ASK THE NURSE
Gail Johnson, Public Health Nurse
Westford Health Department

INFLUENZA (FLU)

The Westford Health Department offers FLU vaccine every year for our residents. Mark your calendars for this year's flu clinics. Please bring your insurance card(s) with you at your appointment. We will be using the COLOR platform again this year, that's where you will pre-register for one of the clinics. Walk-ins are always welcome, but pre-registration is a much quicker process.

SAVE THE DATE:

FLU CLINIC for 65 and older ONLY

DATE: September 18, 2025

LOCATION: Millennium School, behind the Abbot Elementary School, 23 Depot St Westford

TIME: 12:00-4:00 pm

We will have a link on our website for you to pre-register between the middle to end of August from COLOR

Welcome walk-ins, but pre-registration is a quicker option.

COMMUNITY FLU CLINICS for 3 years old and above (includes children 3 & up, adults, and older adults 65 + includes pediatric doses up to high dose for the older adult)

TWO DATES: October 16

October 23

LOCATION: Westford Academy Cafeteria 30 Patten Rd

TIME: 4:00-8:00 pm

*A link will be on our website between the middle to end of August to register for one of these clinics listed above from COLOR



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What is Influenza (FLU)

Influenza (FLU) is spread by droplets, by sneezing, coughing, or talking, it's possible to get the flu by touching surfaces that have droplets on them. Symptoms can last about 3-7 days, sometimes longer. An infected person can be contagious one day before the onset of symptoms to about 3 days after becoming ill. After exposure to the flu virus, it may take up to a couple of days to develop symptoms.

What are the Symptoms of the FLU

Fever, headache, chills, sore throat, body aches, cough, runny nose, and fatigue.

Typical flu season runs in the fall and winter months, where the peak falls between December-February, so preparing for flu season may help prevent exposure to the virus.

What are some tips on prevention

Some very important tips to decrease the chances of getting the flu are frequent hand washing with soap and water, hand sanitizer is ok, but soap and water is better, keep your distance from symptomatic people (hard to do when living with sick family members), cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm, not your hands. If you must go out, wear a mask to protect others from illness, if possible. Stay home when you are sick (from work/school). Clean & disinfect surfaces and get vaccinated!

Who is at risk of complications of the FLU

People who are at higher risk of flu complications, which can lead to hospitalizations or death, are folks with chronic diseases, pregnant women, children under 5, immunocompromised like those getting chemotherapy, and health care workers in close contact with patients with the flu.

When you are sick with the FLU, what are some of the home remedies that you can do

- get plenty of rest
- staying home
- drinking plenty of fluids, or eating your grandma's famous chicken soup
- taking fever reducing medication (Tylenol/Motrin), as needed, or medication to decrease coughing.

If symptoms appear to be getting worse, seek medical care, as soon as possible. Most people recover from the flu on their own, but some might require medical assistance. Sometimes your physician might give you a prescription for an anti-viral medication, which is most effective if taken on the first or 2nd day of symptom onset. It may lessen the symptoms and shorten the time you are ill.



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What are some of the complications of the flu

Bacterial pneumonia, or infections of the respiratory tract (sinus/ear), those with chronic diseases like diabetes, heart conditions, or immunocompromised people are at higher risk of complications.

What is the difference between Influenza A vs. Influenza B

The Centers for Disease Control, CDC defines Influenza A viruses as being divided into subtypes based on two proteins on the virus: hemagglutinin (H) & neuraminidase (N)

There are 18 different hemagglutinin and 11 neuraminidase subtypes.

Influenza A virus in people includes H1N1 & H3N2 and can infect animals, as well. Influenza A has 4 types, the most common A, B, C, and D.

- Influenza A can cause severe illness in people and animals and is the most common type
- Influenza B is usually milder in humans, not seen in animals.
- Influenza C (causes mild infections)
- Influenza D (primarily seen in cattle, not humans).

Influenza B is characterized by the CDC as 2 lineages: B/Yamagata & B/Victoria.

Influenza B Virus are both very distinct affecting different age groups with their evolution, genetic and antigenic properties (per CDC). These 2 influenza B lineages have been co-circulating globally since 1980.

Who determines what type of flu vaccine we get each year

Vaccines are decided via a collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), with other advisory boards, like the CDC and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, ACIP to determine the global strains. This collaboration determines what strains are circulating around the world. The WHO reviews surveillance, laboratory, and clinical studies data and make recommendations, but ultimately the FDA and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) makes the final decision on the composition of flu vaccines, stated by CDC 3/12/24 <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/vaccine-process/vaccine-selection.html>

How come there are many different types of flu vaccine

In 2025, flu vaccine was developed as a trivalent, 3 different influenza viruses, 2 influenza A and influenza B/Victoria Virus, this vaccine is given to people ages 6-months and older. There are different pharmaceutical companies that make the influenza flu vaccine; standard-dose, cell-based, recombinant, high dose for the over 65 years old, and live attenuated influenza nasal spray (Flumist). Flu vaccines are administered intramuscularly. Vaccines are given yearly, typically during the months of September and October, if you receive the vaccine too early like in August for example, the vaccine may decrease protection over time and may not be as effective by the time the peak of flu season arrives, between December-February.



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Tell me why vaccines are given yearly

Vaccines are given yearly because the virus is constantly changing or mutating and there is waning over time from the vaccine. It takes about 2-weeks to build immunity after the flu vaccine is administered. Our immune system produces antibodies (proteins) that help defend against antigens (foreign bodies, viruses like the flu & bacteria, allergens, toxins.)

Receiving the flu vaccine annually offers the best defense from developing severe flu symptoms, hospitalizations, and severe illness and/or death. These antibodies (immunoglobulin) fight off the invading pathogen by adhering to or binding to the invading antigen. that mutate year to year, so getting your flu vaccine is one of the best protections you can give yourself and your family.

What is the difference between an Epidemic vs. Pandemic

Epidemics stay in a specific geographical area and a pandemic extends when the disease spreads to other countries, globally.

What is the history of influenza (FLU): Pandemics

- Spanish Flu **1918** H1N1 flu virus killed an estimated 50 million people, 1/5 of the world's population
- Asian Flu **1957** H2N2 originated in China est. deaths 1.1 million worldwide, in U.S. 116K deaths
- Hong Kong Flu **1968** H3N2 1 million deaths worldwide, in the U.S. 100,000 most deaths over 65 yrs old
- Swine Flu **2009** H1N2 originated in Mexico children most affected per the World Health Organization, WHO 284,000 deaths U.S.

Per the CDC data from May 9, **2025**, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu-burden/php/data-vis/2024-2025.html> It is estimated 27,000-130,000 deaths in the US from Oct 1, 2024-May 17, 2025.

Respectively submitted by,
Gail Johnson, RN
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Westford Health Department

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*NOTE The information above was taken from various sources, to explain influenza. This information is meant to be truthful, accurate, & educational and not meant to misrepresent any article previously written and submitted by any organization. Informational ONLY. NOT MEDICAL ADVICE.