Don't Get Stuck with the Flu!

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts offers tips for staying healthy this Flu season

BOSTON — September 26, 2012 — Before the cool weather from the fall and winter months set in, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts encourages members to get their annual flu shot early. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu activity most commonly peaks in the U.S. in January or February. However, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October, so it's important to get a vaccination early to stay healthy. Experts recommend that everyone six months and older receive a flu shot annually—even if the viruses in the vaccine are the same as the year before, immunity to flu viruses declines over time, resulting in low protection after one year.

"More than 200,000 people are hospitalized each year from the seasonal flu," saidDr. Tom Hawkins, a medical director for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. "Most at risk are children younger than two, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with chronic diseases. With holiday get-togethers quickly approaching, getting a flu shot is an easy and effective way for families and loved ones to stay healthy this holiday season. The vaccine is safe, effective and widely available."

Where to Get a Flu Shot
Flu shots are covered when members visit participating providers. To find a participating provider members can visit: www.bluecrossma.com/flu, or call the number on the front of their ID card. We remind members to bring their Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts member ID card when getting any service from a participating provider/vendor, including their flu shot. Many providers/locations include:

- Primary care provider, certified nurse-midwife, nurse practitioner, or specialist
- Retail settings such as Walmart or Sam's Club stores
- Hospitals (outpatient department or hospital-based clinics)
- Limited services clinics, like a CVS MinuteClinic®
- Urgent care centers
- Public flu shot clinics at community centers, senior center or schools
- Workplace flu clinics

Members who have Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts pharmacy coverage can also receive flu vaccination at Express Scripts, Inc. eligible pharmacies without a prescription. Please visit Member Central to see a list of all participating locations.

Good Hygiene Tips
There are several easy ways to help prevent spreading the flu to your friends, family, co-workers, and the general public. The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Flu Prevention videohelps demonstrate quick and simple ways to keep you healthy this season. Some quick tips include:

- Frequently wash hands with soap and warm water, especially after touching surfaces in public places
- Avoid touching your face, especially if your hands are not washed
- When hand washing is not possible, use antiseptic hand gels that contain alcohol
- Cover the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw out the tissue in the nearest wastebasket and immediately wash hands or use sanitizer. You can also sneeze into the crook of an arm instead
- Stay at least three feet away from people coughing or sneezing
- Immediately wash hands after contact with an ill person
- When sick stay home and keep children home when they are sick

Flu Treatment Tips
Sometimes getting sick is unavoidable. There are several symptoms to lookout for when you suspect you have the flu including: a fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. In some cases, diarrhea and vomiting may also occur. Severe symptoms may last three to six days, and the cough may last for weeks. If flu symptoms develop, there are a number of steps that can be taken to get healthy.

- Avoid contact with others, get rest, stay hydrated, and seek treatment early.
- Consult a doctor or call the Blue Care Line℠, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts' free hotline at**1-888-247-BLUE** (**2583**), where members can speak with a registered nurse 24-hours a day, seven days a week. The CDC encourages high-risk groups, including pregnant women and the elderly, to seek prompt medical attention if they have been exposed to or have developed the flu.
- Drink hot liquids to rehydrate, soothe a sore throat, and unplug a stuffy nose.
- Don't suppress coughs that bring up mucus, and don't consume dairy products for several days.
- Take acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen sodium. Children and teenagers should stay away from aspirin. As always, people should check with their health care providers to make sure that these treatments are appropriate.

For more information, visit www.bluecrossma.com/flu or the CDC's website at: www.cdc.gov/flu. Massachusetts residents looking for up-to-date flu information should call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, toll free, at **1-866-627-7968** or visit www.mass.gov/dph/flu.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (www.bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. Celebrating our 75th anniversary in 2012, we are committed to working with others in a spirit of shared responsibility to make quality health care affordable. Consistent with our corporate promise to always put our 2.8 million members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality.

For further information: CONTACT: Shirley Knowles 617-246-2373 shirley.knowles@bcbsma.com