Stay Healthy This Flu Season!

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts offers FluMist as an added measure to keep members healthy

Boston — October 1, 2013 — In an effort to keep its members healthy and prevent the seasonal spread of the flu, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) encourages members to get their annual flu shot. While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that most flu activity peaks in the United States during January or February, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October, so it's important to get a vaccination early to stay healthy. Influenza experts recommend that anyone 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 tend to decline over time, resulting in low protection after one year.

In an added step to keep BCBSMA members healthy this flu season, almost anyone who has pharmacy benefits with BCBSMA will be able to get FluMist administered at participating ESI retail pharmacies.[1]

"The CDC categorized last year's flu season as 'moderately severe' as it started four weeks early, so we'd like to keep our members protected as much and as early as possible this year," said Dr. Tom Hawkins, a medical director for BCBSMA. "Getting a flu vaccination is an easy and effective way to keep another outbreak from happening. As always, I implore children younger than two, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and those with chronic diseases to get a widely available vaccination."

Where to Get a Flu Vaccination

Flu vaccinations are covered when members visit participating providers, which can be easily found at www.bluecrossma.com/flu, or by calling the number on the front of their ID card. We remind members to bring their BCBSMA 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.
- A retail setting such as Walmart.
- 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 BCBSMA pharmacy coverage can also receive flu vaccination at Express Scripts, Inc. eligible pharmacies without a prescription. Please visit Express Scripts 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 BCBSMA Flu Prevention video helps 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

Getting sick is sometimes 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℠ , BCBSMA's 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 asprin. 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. 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.

[1] **This benefit only applies to members ages 18 and older and who are not pregnant or are immunocompromised. Some pharmacies have restrictions in place around flu vaccine administration by a pharmacist. Members should check with their pharmacy prior to their visit.*

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