Avoid the Flu by Getting an Early Shot!

BOSTON — October 7, 2015 —Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (Blue Cross) encourages everyone to get their annual flu shot to stay healthy during flu season. While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that seasonal flu activity in the United States can begin as early as October, peak activity begins to spike during January or February. Members can visit their doctor as well as places like Rite Aid, Stop and Shop, and Walgreens to get their vaccination.

"Although all of our members will benefit from a flu shot, it is critical that children younger than two, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and those with chronic medical conditions get vaccinated," said Dr. Tom Hawkins, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Medical Director. "Qualifying Blue Cross members can get FluMist from a participating Express Scripts, Inc. retail pharmacy as an alternative to a flu shot."

In addition to getting vaccinated, follow these Flu Prevention Tips:

- Always wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Carry antiseptic hand gels that contain alcohol with you when soap and water are not available.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with the inside of the elbow or a tissue, not your hand.
- Don't share cups or utensils, and wipe down toys and shared surfaces like doorknobs frequently.
- Stay at least three feet away from people coughing or sneezing.
- Immediately wash your hands after contact with an ill person.
- Stay home if you're sick.

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*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.

Flu symptoms include: a fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Diarrhea and vomiting may also occur in some cases.
If you develop flu symptoms:

- Avoid contact with others, get rest, stay hydrated, and seek treatment *early*.
- Consult a doctor or call the Blue Care Line℠, Blue Cross' free hotline at 1(888) 247-BLUE (2583), where members can speak with a registered nurse 24-hours a day, seven days a week.
- 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, you should check with your doctor to make sure that these treatments are appropriate.

For more information on protecting yourself from the flu, 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.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
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 the trusted health plan for more than 30,000 Massachusetts employers and 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.Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

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