

Bureau of Substance Addiction Services  
Massachusetts Dept of Public Health  
Respiratory Virus Information Update, Winter 2024

All links in **blue** are clickable resources

Reminder: Submit Required Notifications when appropriate (cases of COVID are required).

**Forms can be found here**

## Best Practices for Preparing for Flu, RSV, and COVID

- **Healthcare Provider Toolkit: Preparing Your Patients for the Fall and Winter Virus Season**-- Guide for working with your clients to ensure that they are ready for virus season
- **Project Firstline: Infection Control Actions for Respiratory Viruses**--Prepare your site for virus season with these helpful practices
- **Viral Respiratory Pathogens Toolkit for Nursing Homes**- Helpful guide for preparing for and responding to clients or staff who develop signs or symptoms of a respiratory viral infection. The majority of this rich resource is applicable to congregate care settings.
- **MA Respiratory Disease Reporting Dashboard**-- Keep up to date with current rates of COVID-19, RSV, and Flu in Massachusetts

## Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection (RSV) Information

- **CDC Information about RSV**
  - **RSV Prevention**
    - **RSV Vaccine**--available for adults 60 years old and older, pregnant people, and babies
  - **RSV Transmission**
  - **RSV Symptoms**
  - **RSV for High Risk Individuals** --Those at higher risk include adults with certain other underlying medical conditions, adults living in nursing homes, congregate, or long-term care facilities, adults with weakened immune systems, older adults, and adults with chronic heart or lung disease.

## Influenza (Flu) Information

- **CDC Information about Influenza**
  - **Flu Prevention**
    - **Flu vaccine**--The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) recommends annual influenza vaccination for everyone 6 months and older
    - Keeping in mind that **3/4 of all adults** are missing one or more routinely recommended vaccines, it is recommended that sites offer Flu clinics to staff and patients if possible. These can be scheduled with participating local pharmacies.
  - **Flu Symptoms**
  - **Flu Treatment**
  - **Flu for High Risk Individuals**-- Those at higher risk include include adults with certain other chronic medical conditions, adults living in nursing homes, congregate, or long-term care facilities, adults with weakened immune systems, older adults, and adults with chronic heart or lung disease. Flu vaccination is especially important for high risk individuals.

# COVID-19 Information

## COVID-19 Vaccine

- **General COVID-19 vaccine information**
  - Free or low-cost vaccines

<b>If your client has health insurance</b>	Most plans will cover the COVID-19 vaccine at no cost. Please check with your client's health insurance provider.
<b>If your client doesn't have health insurance, or have a health plan that does not cover the cost</b>	<b>You can get a free COVID-19 vaccine from:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your <b>local health department</b> or <b>community health center</b></li><li>• A state-sponsored <b>mobile vaccine clinic</b></li><li>• A pharmacy participating in the CDC's <b>Bridge Access Program</b>, which includes all CVS and Walgreens stores</li></ul>

## Masking and PPE

- **Mask recommendations**--Wearing a mask provides protection against COVID and other viruses, especially when indoors or in crowded spaces.
  - A COVID negative individual should consider wearing a mask especially:
    - If the individual has a weakened immune system
    - If the individual is at increased risk for severe disease because of their age or an underlying medical condition
    - If the individual is in contact with an individual with a weakened immune system or is at increased risk for severe disease
- **PPE Guidance and Resources**
- **Resources**--EOHHS offers over the counter (OTC) rapid antigen tests to contracted congregate care settings that needs tests for outbreak or symptomatic/exposure testing.
  - Tests may be requested at the following link: [bit.ly/covidtestrequestMA](https://bit.ly/covidtestrequestMA)
  - Eligible entities may use statewide contracts to **purchase rapid antigen test kits and personal protective equipment (PPE)**
- **Using a COVID-19 Self-Test**--More information about at-home COVID-19 tests, including links to instructions in multiple languages

## Guidance for Congregate Care Programs

- Congregate care providers must continue to comply with federal and state COVID-19 guidance.
- **General Testing Information**--When to test, symptoms of COVID, etc.
- **EOHHS Congregate Care Surveillance Testing Guidance** --Section III: Testing Protocol
- **Congregate Care Infection Control Resources**--Infection control resources for Congregate Care Settings developed in partnership with Commonwealth Medicine and EOHHS and DPH.
- **CDC Additional Information for Community Congregate Living Settings**--Helpful considerations for congregate care programs to prevent the spread of COVID-19

## Exposure, Isolation and Quarantine

- **COVID-19 Isolation and Exposure Guidance**--Information about isolation and quarantine

Questions? Email your Regional Manager, Licensing Inspector,  
or Healthcare Integration Coordinator, Therese Claxton at [therese.m.claxton@mass.gov](mailto:therese.m.claxton@mass.gov)