

Flu cases are spiking in Massachusetts, and the worst is likely to come

E-MAIL

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

GOOGLE

LINKEDIN

11



SHUTTERSTOCK

It is not too late to get a flu vaccination, state health officials say.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF FEBRUARY 02, 2017

Reports of influenza-like illness are on the rise in Massachusetts and across most of the United

States, as what is typically the peak of flu season approaches.

Rates of reporting of influenza-like illness — defined as having a fever of over 100 degrees Fahrenheit and a cough, sore throat, or both — were highest in a cluster of suburbs west of Boston roughly between the I-95 and I-495 belts and in the western part of the state, as of the week ending Jan. 21, the [latest data](#) from the state Department of Public Health.

Sandwiched between those two regions, communities in central Massachusetts and metro Boston had lower reports of influenza-like illness.

Statewide, the 2016-17 flu season so far has seen higher rates of influenza-like illness reports and higher rates of hospitalization than last year's season, but lower rates than two seasons ago, data show.

LAWLESS
CHRYSLER Jeep DODGE RAM SRT

2017 Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited 4x4

Lease For
\$179/mo*



196 LEXINGTON ST.
WOBURN, MA 01801 **855-389-6978**

>> LAWLESS.COM

START

Get Fast Forward in your inbox:

Forget yesterday's news. Get what you need today in this early-morning email.

Sign Up

Though the timing of flu is unpredictable and can vary season to season, state officials said the worst is likely yet to come, as flu activity tends to peak in February.

“Over the last few weeks we’ve seen increased activity . . . [and] we expect it to pick up and peak in the next couple of weeks,” said Dr. Al DeMaria, state epidemiologist and medical director of the state’s Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences.

“We’re still waiting for it to take off, but it’s definitely high enough now to tell us we’re into the flu season,” he added.

Last season, 2015-16, flu activity peaked later than usual, in March.

The year before that, [the 2014-15 season](#), saw high numbers of people infected with the illness, which experts said they believed was related to a flu vaccine that turned out to be a poor match for the virus in circulation that season.

(Each year, months before the start of the flu season in the United States, [health authorities examine](#) which strains are circulating elsewhere in the world and make their best judgment about the types of flu likely to strike and include those strains in that year’s vaccine. It can take several months to produce large quantities of influenza vaccine.)

This year, “so far, it looks like it’s a good match,” said DeMaria, noting that it’s still early in the season.

At best, vaccination reduces the risk of contracting the flu by about 50 to 60 percent, recent [studies have shown](#), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“It’s still the best thing you can do to protect yourself,” DeMaria said.

And, “it’s not too late to get a flu shot.”



Flu cases are spiking in Massachusetts, and the worst is

Officials said that people who haven't been vaccinated already can contact their health care provider, local board of health, or nearby pharmacy to get vaccinated.

Nationwide, influenza activity was considered to be "widespread" in 37 states, including Massachusetts, as of the week ending Jan. 21, the latest [data](#) tracked by the CDC.

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs, [the CDC says](#). Symptoms can include fever or feeling chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue.

It can cause mild to severe illness, and can lead to death, [officials say](#).

Each year, the flu sickens millions of people in the United States, sending hundreds of thousands of them to hospitals, and thousands, if not tens of thousands, die, [the CDC says](#).

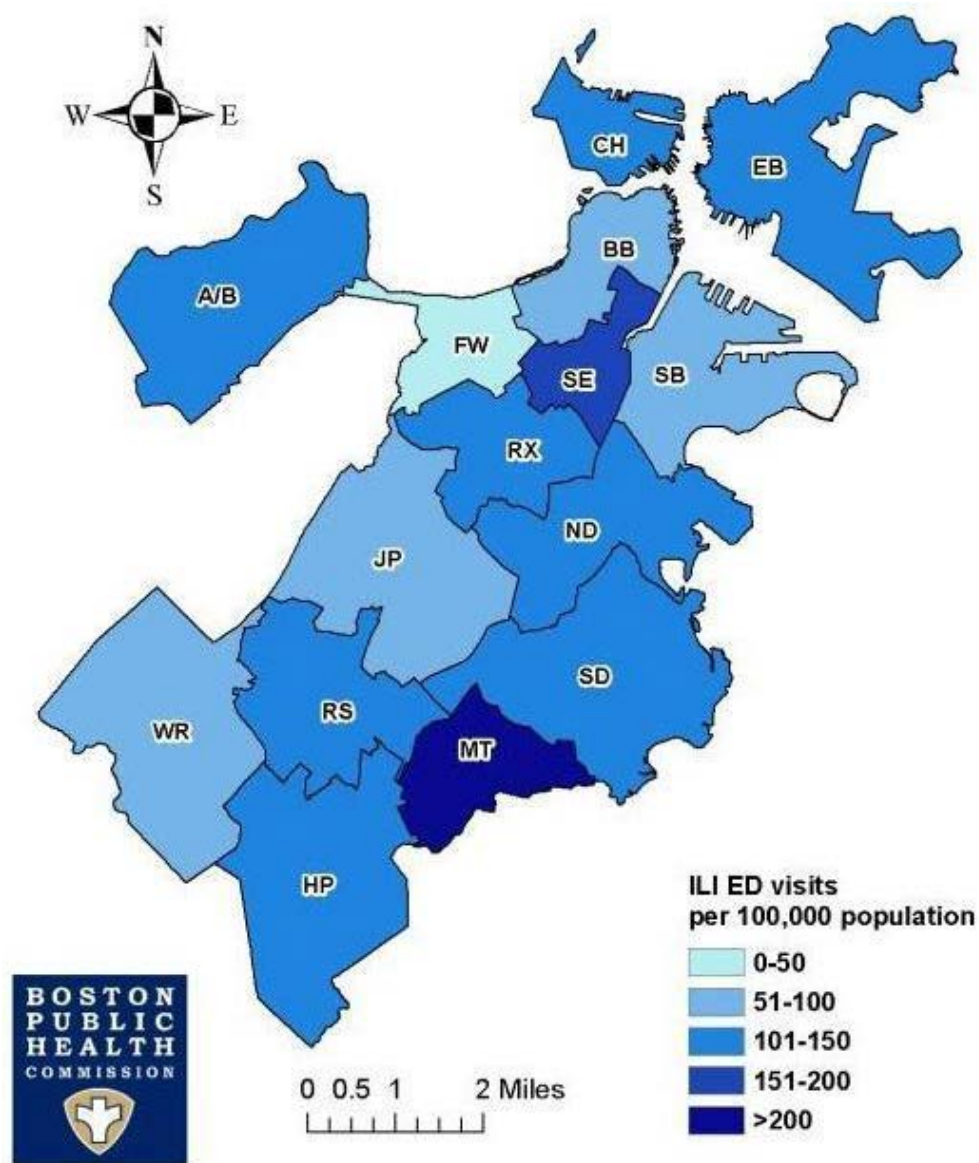
People most at risk for serious complications include young children, pregnant women, people 65 years and older, and people with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease.



START

The best way to prevent catching the virus is to get a flu vaccination each year, [the CDC says](#).

The agency also recommends staying away from people who are sick, covering coughs and sneezes, and frequent handwashing.



BOSTON PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSION

The above map of the City of Boston shows a neighborhood-by-neighborhood per capita breakdown rates of emergency department visits for influenza-like illness so far this flu season, as of the week ending Jan. 21.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele).

SHOW 11 COMMENTS

Stay updated, right in your news feed.

Top 10 Trending Articles

- Most Viewed
- Most Commented
- Most Shared

...

Nick Cafardo: Which players may be available in trade after ...

Trump forsakes scenic traditions to vacation in the land of s...

Trump administration advances religious researchers' birth ...

What's it like be an NFL quarterback at 40? We asked Warr...

Dick Albert, former Channel 5 weatherman, dies

Trump increasingly isolated as disillusionment grows withi...
My Account

There's one month left of summer. Here's what you can't mi...
Manage my Account

Former Patriots QB Jim Plunkett: 'My life sucks'
Mobile Customer Service

Special Counsel Mueller asks White House for documents o...
Sign Up For Newsletters

Contact
Storms could bring hail and severe winds Saturday

Help

FAQs

Globe newsroom

Advertise

Social

Facebook

Twitter

Google+

More

ePaper

News in Education

Archives

Privacy policy

[Terms of service](#)

[Terms of purchase](#)

[Work at Boston Globe Media](#)

© 2017 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC