



GET SMART

### Bad news on the flu: Season striking early and will peak around the holidays



EVAN VUCCI/ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE 2010

**This year, there is concern that vaccination will be less effective than usual at preventing the spread of the flu.**

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 05, 2017

Flu season has arrived early this year and appears on course to peak right around the holidays.

What's more, the dominant strain circulating now is known to cause more severe symptoms than other types, and there is concern that vaccination will be less effective than usual at preventing its spread.

ADVERTISING

[inRead](#) invented by Teads

Still, public health officials are urging people to get a flu shot as soon as possible. They say it's the best chance at avoiding getting sick. Even for those who catch the virus, getting vaccinated can help minimize the severity of symptoms.

ADVERTISEMENT



"So people don't have their holidays ruined, one of the things they can do now is make sure they have their flu shots," said Dr. Al DeMaria, medical director of the state's infectious disease bureau.

Get **Metro Headlines** in your inbox:

The 10 top local news stories from metro Boston and around New England delivered daily.

[Sign Up](#)

DeMaria said the last time the peak of flu season collided with the late-December holiday season was in 2003.

So why the concern that this year's vaccines might be less effective?

The vaccine being used in the United States now is the same as the one that was just used and performed poorly in another part of the world. In Australia, which typically has its flu season end just before ours starts, the vaccine this year was, based on [preliminary estimates](#), only around 10 percent effective in preventing against the same flu strain that's dominant so far in the United States.

"It's an indication that we may have that issue," DeMaria said. But, he and other specialists said, we won't know for sure until later in the season once researchers have enough data to calculate how effective vaccination was in the United States.

ADVERTISEMENT

---

Each flu season is unique in terms of timing and severity, but cases of influenza don't usually peak until January, February, or even as late as March.

State public health Commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel said in a statement Tuesday that officials have in recent weeks seen "a very rapid increase in influenza-like illness across Massachusetts, along with an increase in confirmed flu cases."

The state health department's latest weekly [report](#) on the flu, released Dec. 1, said the geographic distribution of the influenza-like illness activity in Massachusetts was "widespread" and "increasing, consistent with rising activity in other parts of the United States."

However, Dr. Jenifer Jaeger, interim medical director of the Boston Public Health Commission, said the city has not seen above-normal flu activity so far.

The most common symptoms of flu are a fever accompanied by a cough or sore throat. Other symptoms include body aches, headache, chills, runny nose, and fatigue. Some people, especially young children, might also have diarrhea and vomiting, officials said. Symptoms can last from a few days to up to a week or more.

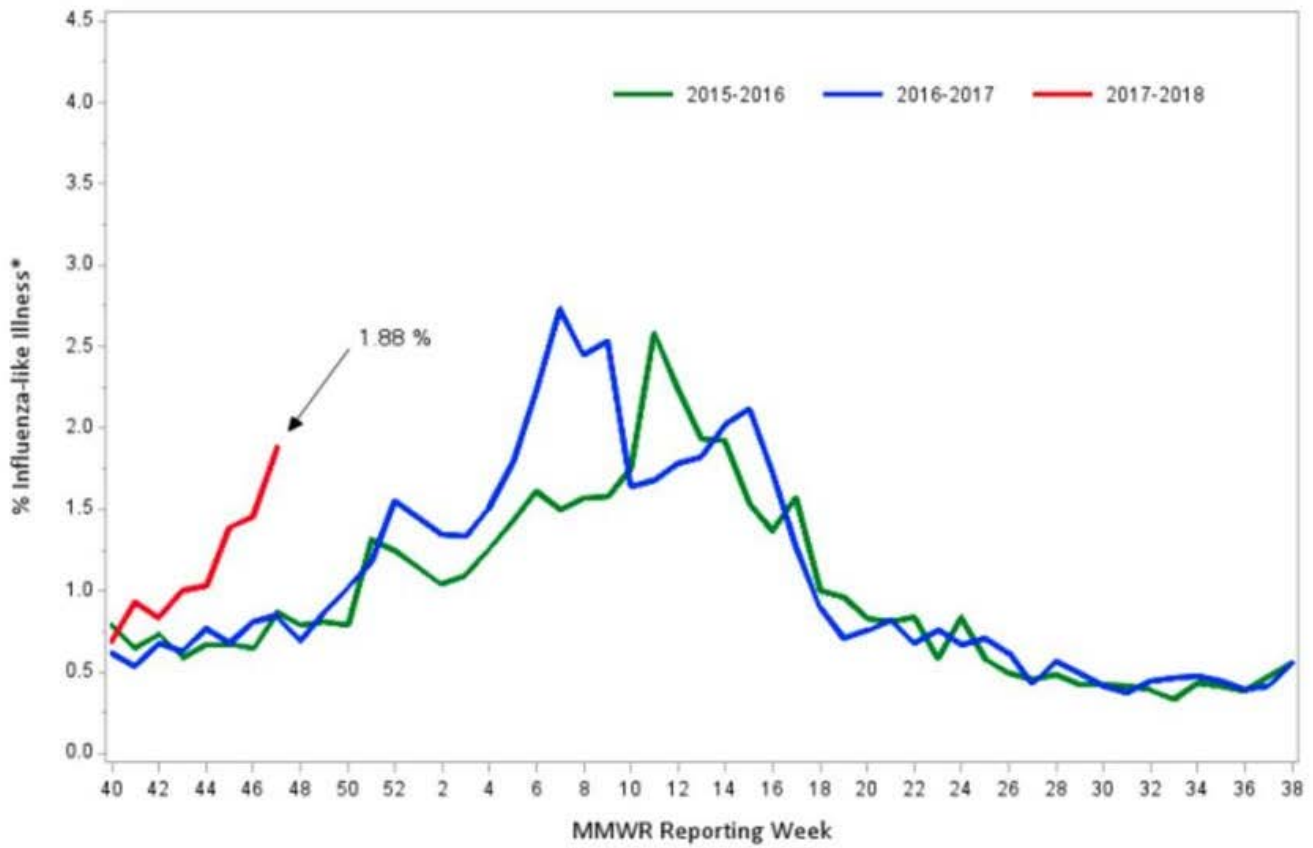
ADVERTISEMENT



---

The virus spreads through droplets of saliva and mucus that exit the nose and mouth of an infected person when they cough or sneeze, officials said. People can catch the virus if they are simply breathing close to an infected person when that happens.

Figure 1: Percentage of ILI visits reported by sentinel provider sites



\*Influenza-like illness (ILI, defined by fever >100F and cough and/or sore throat), as reported by Massachusetts sentinel surveillance sites

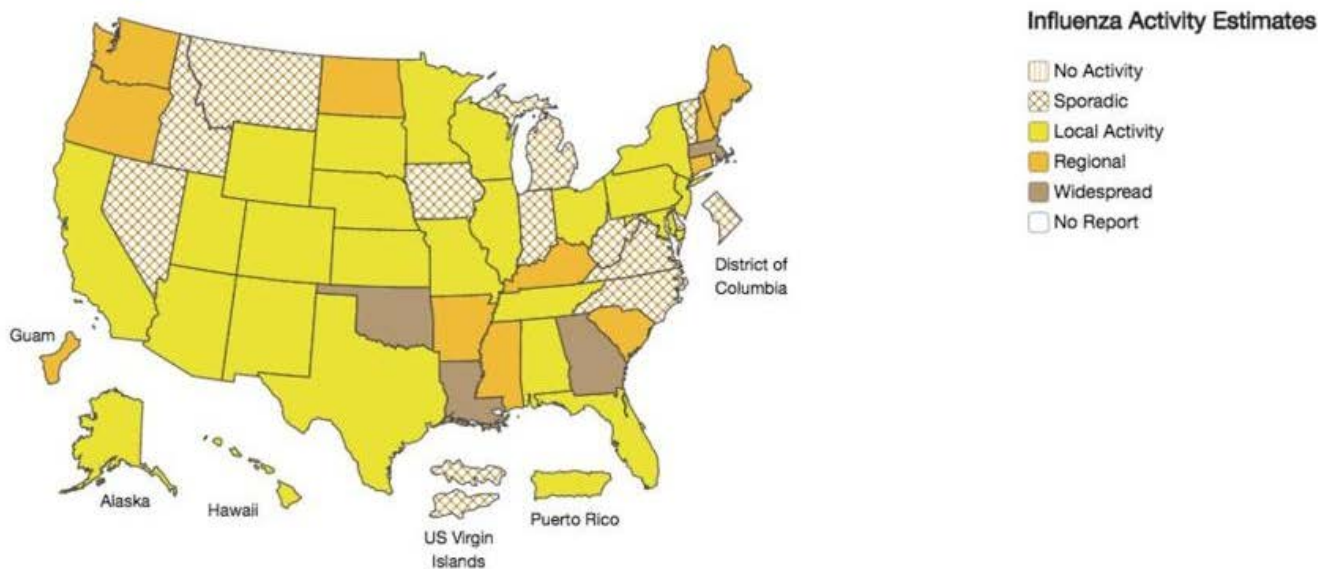
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The virus can also survive for a short time on everyday objects, such as doorknobs, phones, and toys. Someone can catch the virus if they touch such objects and then touch their mouth, nose, or eyes, officials said.

## A Weekly Influenza Surveillance Report Prepared by the Influenza Division

Weekly Influenza Activity Estimates Reported by State and Territorial Epidemiologists\*

Week Ending Nov 25, 2017 - Week 47



\*This map indicates geographic spread and does not measure the severity of influenza activity.

US CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

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

Show 9 Comments

### Top 10 Trending Articles

| Viewed | Commented | Shared |
|--------|-----------|--------|
|--------|-----------|--------|

Mass. authorities face steep hurdles in shutting down sex trafficking

Ideas | Linda Rodriguez McRobbie: Too old to be president? Science says yes.

Julia Ruth Stevens, Babe Ruth's last surviving child, dies at 102

The backyard mechanic who is taking on Tesla

Road to Recovery: Drugs took their children, but not their hope that others might be saved

Six things to know about Michael Bennett, the newest Patriot

'SNL' tackles R. Kelly sex assault accusations with parody of CBS interview, Pete Davidson monologue

Patriots could be diving into the quarterback market

Yvonne Abraham | Recycling can't fix what really ails us

As UMass makes a big bet on online education, rivals offer words of caution

Weak February jobs report clouds the economic picture

GE's would-be HQ tower could be turned into labs

Prosecutors detail disturbing evidence in case against Louis Coleman, charged with kidnapping Jassy Correia

Northampton lawyer who defended nurse against death penalty set to represent Coleman

When visiting the equator, where do you draw the line?

A fairy tale that pulls you close

[China suggests a trade compromise with the Trump administration](#)

[Ideas | Ryan Walsh: Homage or plagiarism? A worrisome pop music precedent.](#)

[Cape Cod St. Patrick's Day Parade honors slain Yarmouth sergeant, his K-9 partner](#)

[The thrill is gone: Michael Jackson really makes us uncomfortable now, so his music should, too](#)

[Sex trafficking is in plain sight in Massachusetts communities](#)

[First lady has a growing ease in her official role, but not politics](#)

[Recycling can't fix what really ails us](#)

[Tara Sullivan: Enough with the PED excuses](#)

[At SXSW, Elizabeth Warren defends call for breaking up tech giants](#)

[New Orleans Saints fans need to get a grip](#)

[Drugs took their children but not their hope: That others might be saved](#)

[As UMass makes a big bet on online education, rivals offer words of caution](#)

[Kyrie Irving, Celtics finish off Lakers this time](#)

[Centrists squirm as 2020 Democrats swerve left](#)

[Most Popular In Metro →](#)

### Subscribe Now

[Digital Access](#)

[Home Delivery](#)

[Gift Subscriptions](#)

### My Account

[Manage my Account](#)

[Mobile Customer Service](#)

[Sign Up For Newsletters](#)

### Contact

[Help](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Globe newsroom](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Order back issues](#)

### Social

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Google+](#)

### More

[ePaper](#)

[News in Education](#)

[Archives](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

[Terms of service](#)

[Terms of purchase](#)

[Work at Boston Globe Media](#)