

Metro ▾

	SECTIONS	0 MY SAVED	▾
NEWS ▶	METRO		🔍
ARTS ▶	BUSINESS ▶		
SPORTS ▶	OPINION ▶		
LIFESTYLE ▶	MAGAZINE ▶		
INSIDERS ▶	TODAY'S PAPER ▶		
LOTTERY ▶	OBITUARIES ▶		
GLOBE NORTH ▶	GLOBE SOUTH ▶		
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Metro

Thousands line up to get flu vaccine in Boston

Free clinics draw a record number

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 14, 2013

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More people were vaccinated for seasonal influenza in Boston this past weekend than ever before during a three-day span, city health officials said on Sunday.

In 24 free flu clinics held over the weekend, more than 7,000 people received immunization for the virus. Boston residents made up most of the turnout, and a large number were children, officials said.

“It was a huge success,” said Barbara Ferrer, executive director of the Boston Public Health Commission, which declared a state of emergency for the city last week due to the seriousness of this year’s flu outbreak.

“This will dampen the spread,” she said. “It may take a little while for the data to show that, but this had a

huge impact. It went exactly how we wanted it to go.”

More than 750 confirmed cases of the flu have been reported in Boston this season compared with about 70 at this time one year ago, the city’s health commission said.

There have been at least five flu-related deaths in Boston this season, all adults over age 65.

A child under the age of 6 also died after contracting the flu, according to city officials, but an official cause for the death has not been determined.

There have been 18 flu-related deaths in Massachusetts this season, according to the state’s health department.

Reports describing the seriousness of the outbreak prompted Margaret Roache of West Roxbury to bring her 13-year-old twin sons, Patrick and Kevin, to a free flu vaccination clinic at the Codman Square Health Center in Dorchester on Sunday.

“I’m concerned about the epidemic and there’s no downside to getting [the vaccination],” she said.

She said she got her flu shot earlier in the season, but had not been able to schedule appointments for her sons.

Roache said she has contracted the flu before, but her sons have not.

“It’s brutal. I don’t want them to go through it,” she said.

The Codman Square location was the last health center in Boston to hold one of the 24 city-sponsored immunization clinics this weekend, Ferrer said.

People began arriving two hours before the clinic’s scheduled start at noon, said Candice Gartley, a public relations specialist for the center.

At times, lines stretched out the door.

Some who received the vaccine told Gartley they waited in line for more than two hours.

“I think people were really listening to the city’s request,” she said.



“

7,000

“It’s not just for yourself. Everyone around you gets infected if you get sick.”

Ferrer said only one of the flu clinic locations, in the Fenway, ran out of vaccine just before the clinic was scheduled to end on Saturday.

The city had purchased more than 6,000 flu vaccines for the clinics this past weekend, she said.

Those doses were offered at health centers that agreed to run clinics open to the general public and not just to their own patients.

Some health centers also used their own supplies of the vaccine, Ferrer said.

The city has ordered another “couple thousand” doses that are expected to arrive Monday, she said.

The health commission plans to partner with the health centers to hold more free public flu vaccination clinics, which will be scheduled based on demand.

Ferrer said she does not expect to see another stretch as busy as the past weekend.

And, “we’re confident that there will be plenty of vaccine” to meet the rest of this flu season’s demand, she said.

Altogether, the city has given out about 15,000 doses, including some that are allocated by the state, Ferrer said. The city has spent “tens of thousands” of dollars on flu vaccine doses.

For more information about getting vaccinated for free, visit the health commission’s website, www.bphc.org, or call 617-534-5050.

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