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Dear Families,

The safety and wellbeing of residents and staff of long-term care facilities remains a top priority of the Department of Public Health (DPH). As we prepare for the fall and winter respiratory virus season, I am pleased to share that this is the first season where vaccines are available for the three respiratory viruses responsible for most illness, hospitalizations, and deaths. Influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccines can provide life-saving protection against all three viral respiratory diseases. and are recommended for older adults who are at higher risk of severe illness from these diseases.

Ensuring your loved one who resides in a long-term care facility receives all recommended vaccines is the best way to protect them against severe illness from influenza, COVID-19, and RSV. Please talk to your loved one about these recommended vaccinations and encourage them to get vaccinated.

Getting you and your loved ones, especially those who reside in a long-term care facility, all recommended vaccines is the best way to protect against severe illness from influenza, COVID-19, and RSV.

To limit the spread of respiratory viruses, DPH strongly recommends the following guidance to protect your loved ones, yourself, and your other family members and caregivers.

- **Get Vaccinated:**
 - Influenza (flu): Annual flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older.
 - COVID-19: The updated COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older.
 - RSV: There are now vaccines available for those most vulnerable to respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), who include older people and infants. CDC recommends that those who are 60 years or older discuss RSV vaccination with their health care provider. For protection of infants, CDC recommends that certain pregnant

people, infants and young children are immunized. You can learn more here: [RSV Immunizations \(CDC\)](#)¹.

- **Stay Home if You are Sick and Test for COVID-19.** Stay home if you are sick. If you are feeling unwell, test for COVID-19 and flu. If you test positive or are diagnosed with any respiratory illness, please defer visitation, continue to stay home and contact your healthcare provider to discuss treatment options. If you test positive for COVID-19, you may also utilize the [state's free telehealth service](#)², which can quickly provide you with treatment if you meet certain requirements. **Wear a Mask:** There may be times when staff and visitors need to wear facemasks in long-term care facilities to prevent transmission of respiratory illnesses. Wearing a mask provides protection against the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, especially when indoors or in crowded spaces, or when interacting with high-risk individuals. Additionally, healthcare providers should provide facemasks to any patients or visitors who indicate a preference to wear them.
- **Hand Hygiene:** Frequent hand hygiene using alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water is an effective way to prevent the spread of germs. Use hand hygiene when you get to your loved one's long-term care facility and during your visit.
- **Cover Your Cough or Sneeze:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in the trash. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands. Remember to immediately wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the health and safety of your loved ones as DPH continues efforts to protect all of our residents in long-term care facilities.

Sincerely,



Robbie Goldstein, MD, PhD

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/rsv/index.html>

² <http://mass.gov/covidtelehealth>