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**Staying Home with the Flu: Instructions for Those
 Who Are Sick and Their Close Contacts**

Dear Flu Sufferer,

You are suspected of having flu or have been diagnosed with flu. To help prevent the spread of flu virus to others, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is asking you to **stay at home until you have been free from fever for at least 24 hours after your last dose of fever-reducing medication.** Fever-reducing medications include acetaminophen (like Tylenol or a store name) and ibuprofen (like Advil or Motrin or a store name). For most people this will mean staying at home for about four days, but it could be longer.

During the period that you have symptoms, especially fever, it is possible for you to spread flu to those who have close contact with you (for example, to someone living with or caring for you). Flu can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is also possible to become infected by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus, and then touching your own nose or mouth.

To prevent the spread of flu while you are sick, please follow these guidelines:

YOU SHOULD:

- **ALWAYS** cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose (or cough and sneeze into the inside of your elbow). Never cough in the direction of someone else. Throw out your used tissues with your regular garbage.
- **ALWAYS** wash your hands with soap or water or use alcohol-based hand rubs after coughing or sneezing and after throwing used tissues in the garbage.
- **Limit contact with others;** avoid close contact. People you live with should limit contact with you. They should not touch their nose, face or eyes after contact with you without washing their hands or using an alcohol-based rub. If possible, make one person (not someone who is pregnant) the main person who will care for you while you're sick. If possible, stay in a room separate from other people in the house.
- Clean all recently contaminated surfaces such as bedside tables, bathroom surfaces, doorknobs, and children's toys with a regular household cleaner. The person doing the cleaning should wash their hands after cleaning the area. Dirty dishes and eating utensils should be washed in a dishwasher or by hand with warm water and soap.
- Laundry can be washed in a regular washing machine with warm or cold water and detergent. Linens and towels should also be tumble dried on a hot setting if possible. It is not necessary to separate your laundry from other laundry.
- Stay at home until you have been free from fever for at least 24 hours after your last dose of fever-reducing medication (like Tylenol, Advil or Motrin or a store brand).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLOSE CONTACTS (People living with or caring for someone with flu):

- **Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub frequently, and after every time you come in contact with the sick person.**
- Limit contact with the sick person; Limit contact with the sick person, especially while they have a fever and are coughing and sneezing.
- Watch yourself closely for flu-like symptoms (fever and cough or sore throat) for 7 days after your last contact with the sick person. If you get sick with fever, cough, or sore throat, stay at home and follow the guidelines listed on page one.
- Sick people should not have visitors while they are sick with flu or a flu-like illness. If other people must enter the home, they should avoid contact with the sick person.
- If you are washing the bed sheets and towels for the sick person, you should use regular laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting if possible. Avoid holding laundry close to your body when you are carrying it, and clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub after handling dirty laundry.

IF I AM SICK WITH THE FLU DO I NEED TO TAKE SPECIAL MEDICINE?

You should only take prescription medicine if your doctor prescribes it for you. For people with some medical conditions, either Tamiflu™ or Relenza™ may be recommended. Ask your doctor to see if you need prescription medicine. You should also rest, drink plenty of liquids, and take the medications that you would normally take to treat your symptoms, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol or store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or store brand).

People who are under 18 years of age should NOT take aspirin or aspirin-containing products. This can cause a rare serious illness called Reye Syndrome in young people with the flu.

WHAT ARE FEVER-REDUCING MEDICATIONS AND WHEN SHOULD I STOP TAKING THEM?

Fever-reducing medications are ones that contain acetaminophen (Tylenol or store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or store brand). These medicines can be given to people who are sick with flu to help bring their fever down and relieve their pain. As you begin to feel better you will probably not need fever-reducing medicines and will stop taking them. You should stay at home until you have been free from fever for at least 24 hours after the last dose of fever-reducing medication.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY SYMPTOMS GET WORSE?

If your symptoms get worse, especially if you begin to have trouble breathing, you should call your doctor or seek help at an emergency room. When going to the doctor's office or the emergency room, you should avoid taking public transportation (subway or bus) if possible.

If you go to your doctor, please contact the doctor's office before you leave home and tell them you have flu-like symptoms. When you arrive at the doctor's office, go straight to the receptionist or nurse so that you can be put in a private room while you wait. You may be asked to wear a mask and you should sit away from others as much as possible. If you call an ambulance, let the operator know that you have flu-like symptoms, and also let the ambulance crew know when they arrive.

SHOULD PEOPLE I LIVE WITH TAKE MEDICINE TO PREVENT FLU?

DPH recommends preventive medication for household or other close contacts who have health conditions that may put them at risk for more severe illness. To find out whether preventive medication, such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) is recommended, talk to your doctor.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Talk to your doctor; call 211; or visit the following websites that have information about flu: www.mass.gov/dph/flu and www.cdc.gov. Especially recommended is the DPH booklet "[Flu What You Can Do: Caring for People at Home](#)" available in nine languages.