



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

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Get Ready for the Holiday Season: Flu, Food, and Fuel Assistance

By Steven Belec, director, Mayor's Health Line, Boston Public Health Commission

The city of Boston is unfolding into a snowy wonderland for the holiday season. For many residents, the winter can be daunting; heating bills begin to pile up, food supplies at home seem to deplete faster than ever and, to top it off, many residents have had to stay home from work or school because of seasonal or H1N1 (swine flu) influenza.

Do you need help paying heating bills? Does your family have an ample supply of nutritious foods to power through the holidays? Are you confused and overwhelmed by all you hear about the "swine flu" this year?

The Mayor's Health Line Can Help

The Mayor's Health Line, a program of the Boston Public Health Commission, is a free, confidential, and multilingual information and referral phone service. We have the resources to help keep you and your family safe and healthy this winter.

Fuel Assistance

Programs, like the ABCD Energy Conservation Program, can assist in paying heating bills during the heating season of November through April. They also provide discounts for gas, electricity, and telephone bills. The Mayor's Health Line can start applications for fuel assistance and offer tips to save heat, energy, and money. We can point you in the right direction to help make sure your household stays warm this winter. Certain income restrictions may apply.

Food Assistance

The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, can help Massachusetts residents buy food for your household, including breads, cereals, meats, and vegetables. SNAP can also help you buy seeds and plants so you can produce your own food. The Mayor's Health Line can start an application for SNAP for you right over the phone, in any language. Again, certain income restrictions may apply.

Flu Prevention

The Commission has been working very hard to protect residents from both seasonal and H1N1 influenza, which typically begins sometime between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and can continue well into early spring. However, with so much conflicting advice for flu prevention and news coverage about the swine flu, it may be difficult to know the truth about the flu. The Mayor's Health Line can provide accurate flu information, tips for prevention, and most importantly, help you find a free public flu vaccination clinic close to your home.

Call the Mayor's Health Line at 617-534-5050

We can help you get ready for the winter and assist you with your other health care needs: health insurance, finding a doctor, affordable prescriptions, and more. Specializing in providing multilingual assistance in over 160 languages, our staff can help find the health program right for you and your family.

To start your application for fuel or food assistance, or to find a flu clinic near you, call the Mayor's Health Line at 617-534- 5050 (Toll free: 1-800-847-0719). You can also visit our website: <http://www.bphc.org/mayorshealthline>. We are open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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