**Flu Season Update, January 2015**

*You’ve probably heard that this year’s flu vaccine is not a perfect match.*

Reports this year indicate that the seasonal flu vaccine may be less effective due to a change in one of the viruses included in the vaccine. However, this doesn’t mean the vaccine isn’t helping you stay healthy this flu season.

Although this season’s vaccine may not protect completely, it should work well against some of the circulating viruses, minimize symptoms if you do get the flu and help prevent serious flu complications.

The Health & Human Services Department vaccinated 3,500 students and more than 1,100 school staff members against influenza in October and November. This is 27.9 percent of our students. Anyone who would still like to receive a flu vaccine may call the HHS Department at (617) 796-1420 and speak to the public health nurse to make an appointment.

Massachusetts is one of the states reporting widespread flu activity and people who have the flu can be contagious before they develop symptoms. Here are some everyday preventive measures to take:

* Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
* Keep your child home from school for 24 hours after a fever without the use of fever-reducing medication.
* While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
* Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
* Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
* Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
* Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

For more information http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/general/take3.pdf

**Emergency Preparedness for Student’s with Allergies**

The start of the new year is a good time to be sure your child’s emergency epinephrine medication is up-to-date and available at school.

A recent anaphylaxis episode of a Newton Public School student highlights the importance of having emergency epinephrine available. A student with a known life-threatening food allergy had a severe reaction at the end of the school day. Trained teachers responded and fortunately, the student was carrying an Epipen. Proper procedure was followed; the student was transported to the hospital and recovered from this allergic episode.

An emergency can happen anytime – please be prepared:

* Report life-threatening allergies to the school nurse – update the status annually
* Teach your child about avoiding an exposure
* Provide non-expired emergency epinephrine medication to the school nurse
* If appropriate, have your child carry emergency epinephrine with them

For any questions related to influenza or allergies, contact the school nurse.