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IMPORTANT NOTICE ABOUT INFLUENZA (FLU) VACCINE FOR FY 11-12 SEASON

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 8, 2011

The City of Newburyport Health Department would like to inform Newburyport residents of important changes in the distribution of free, state-supplied influenza (flu) vaccine for the FY11-12 Influenza season.

In previous years, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) has provided local city and town Health Departments with free, state-supplied influenza (flu) vaccine for distribution to priority groups. Traditionally, senior citizens, adults with chronic illnesses and children have been among the highest priority groups and are the first to be offered the influenza vaccine.

This year, the MDPH has informed all the local city and town Health Departments in Massachusetts that due to State budget constraints all local city and town Health Departments will be receiving less than half of the amount of state-supplied influenza vaccine that was provided by the MDPH last year. The MDPH has also stated that the state-supplied influenza vaccine **MUST** be targeted to individuals without health insurance, or individuals who have insurance that does not cover vaccinations.

Individuals with private health insurance or who are insured through government programs should make arrangements to receive the influenza vaccine from their own primary care providers or alternative sites such as pharmacies.

Robert F. Bracey, Director of Public Health for the City of Newburyport has stated, "Traditionally, residents of Massachusetts have associated local public health departments within their communities as a primary provider of free influenza vaccine for their residents. It is extremely disheartening that now local city and town Health Departments must scale back on providing this important public health service."

Influenza vaccine is now widely available through primary care physicians, healthcare consultants, Doctor's offices and at local pharmacies, such as CVS and Walgreen's. The City Health Department encourages all Newburyport residents to get the influenza vaccine at any of these locations.

The Health Department would like to thank residents for their understanding as we continue to work together to improve the health of our community. Influenza vaccine is generally offered early in the fall and continues through the winter months. However, the Newburyport Health Department is sending out this advisory notice early to ensure that all residents have the information they need in order to make alternative arrangements to receive influenza vaccine for this coming influenza season.

Seasonal Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone ages 6 months and over. The Newburyport Health Department urges residents to continue to receive the Influenza vaccine annually through their primary care physicians, health care consultants, doctor's offices or at local pharmacies.

If you need assistance finding a healthcare provider or need additional information or have any questions about the important changes to the influenza vaccine distribution, please contact the Newburyport Health Department at (978) 465-4410 or visit the Health Department website at <http://www.cityofnewburyport.com/Health.htm> or visit the Commonwealth of Massachusetts State Public Health Department website at www.mass.gov/dph/flu

