



North Quabbin Health Collaborative

Public Health Newsletter
COVERING: December 29th – January 4th, 2026
PUBLISHED January 9, 2026



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Upcoming Events:

Next Collaborative Meeting

Monday March 30th at 6pm

Location: Orange Town Hall

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UPDATES:

ORANGE

The Orange Food Pantry is now open in their new location at 81 East River Street. They will be back to normal hours of 10:00a.m. - 3:00p.m. on Thursdays starting Thursday, January 8, 2026.

NEW SALEM Library

The Friends of the Library are pleased to announce that the 2026 season of Reading Aloud for Grownups will have three events, all on Thursday evenings. First up: January 15 with readers Lisa Finestone and Sally Howe. They'll each read a short story of their choosing, and both are sure to entertain you with their literary selections. Then save these days: February 19 and March 19. Readings will be from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the library (with refreshments!) as well as simulcast on Zoom. Email the Friends at nsfriendsoflibrary@gmail.com with questions.

Reminders

- **Saturday January 10th is National Vision Board Day** - Go ahead and start yours today!
- **Tuesday January 13th is National Sticker Day** - Give yourself a gold star and wear it proudly

Visit the North Quabbin Health Collaborative website to download materials and see additional information at: <https://www.northquabbinhc.org/>

Don't forget to send your area news and activities to cpage@townoforange.org to be included in the next newsletter.

Massachusetts Reports Very High Flu Activity with Cases Climbing

Pediatric deaths underscore urgent need for vaccination and preventive measures
BOSTON (January 5, 2026) – The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is reporting very high and rising levels of influenza activity statewide as the Commonwealth moves through peak flu season. Thousands of residents have become ill, forcing them to miss work, school, and other activities. Many are experiencing serious complications, leading to increased visits to urgent care centers and emergency departments, and high levels of hospitalization.

The current widespread burden of illness underscores the importance of taking preventive measures, especially vaccination, to reduce severe disease and protect individuals, families, and communities.

Tragically, influenza has already been reported to be associated with the deaths of three pediatric patients in Massachusetts during recent weeks. In addition, there have been 29 adult influenza deaths reported so far this season. While COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) rates currently remain low, cases of both illnesses are beginning to rise. DPH is reviewing two possible COVID-19-associated deaths and one RSV-associated death in individuals younger than 18 years.

“This is a moment for clarity, urgency, and action,” said Public Health Commissioner Robbie Goldstein, MD, PhD. “These viruses are serious, dangerous, and life-threatening. We are seeing children who are seriously ill, families grieving devastating losses, and hospitals under capacity strain. There is a simple, effective, and available way to address these concerns: vaccines. They can prevent serious illness and hospitalization. And they save lives. If you have not yet been vaccinated against flu or COVID-19 this season, now is the time. It is not too late. Choosing vaccination is choosing to protect yourself, your family, your friends, your colleagues, and your community.”

Hospitals across Massachusetts are continuing to see high numbers of patients seeking care for respiratory illness. Each day last week, there were nearly 9,000 emergency department visits statewide, with approximately one-quarter of those related to acute respiratory illness, including flu, COVID-19, and RSV. Some regions in the state reported challenging hospital capacity levels exceeding 90% in medical-surgical units, largely related to influenza. DPH urges everyone 6 months of age and older to stay up to date on flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. These annual shots can be given at the same visit and are available from local boards of health, community health centers, pharmacies, and many health care providers.

Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of severe disease, including adults age 65 years and older, children between 6 months and 2 years old, people with chronic respiratory conditions or heart disease, individuals who are immunocompromised, and people who are pregnant. Vaccination also helps protect family members, coworkers, and others in the community who may be more vulnerable to serious illness.

Massachusetts Reports Very High Flu Activity with Cases Climbing Continued

For RSV, one-time immunization is recommended for adults age 75 and older, those aged 50-74 who have conditions that put them at increased risk, and people who are pregnant. For infants and children, parents should talk with their child's health care provider about RSV immunization. It is recommended that infants younger than 8 months be immunized if the birth parent did not receive the RSV shot during pregnancy. Children between 8 and 19 months who are at increased risk because of certain pulmonary or immune system disorders should also be immunized.

In Massachusetts, vaccines are covered by insurance and are available at no cost for almost all adults. All vaccines for individuals younger than 18 years are supplied free of charge to health care providers through the state's universal childhood immunization program.

For those who begin to experience flu symptoms – which include high fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, extreme fatigue, cough, sore throat, and congestion – antiviral medications, such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu), are available by prescription. When started early, these medications can significantly reduce the severity of illness. Parents are encouraged to seek medical advice promptly if they or their children develop flu-like symptoms.

Spending time indoors and around larger groups increases the likelihood of exposure to respiratory viruses. The following everyday measures can help prevent illness:

- Stay up to date on flu and COVID-19 vaccinations
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water
- Stay home when sick
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Consider wearing a mask in crowded indoor settings, especially if you or a loved one is at higher risk.

DPH continues to closely monitor respiratory activity and hospital capacity across Massachusetts. Up-to-date data are available on the [DPH respiratory virus dashboard](#).

DPH Guidance on Recommended Reference Materials for Pediatric Immunization Schedules

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is issuing this notification to inform clinicians of a change in recommended reference materials for pediatric immunization schedules.

DPH has a longstanding and ongoing commitment to promoting evidence-based immunization practices that protect communities from vaccine preventable illnesses. Following a review of recent changes to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) pediatric immunization schedule, DPH now recommends that clinicians in Massachusetts use the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Recommended Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule as the primary reference for the routine immunization of infants, children, and adolescents.

DPH recognizes the importance of clear, consistent, and evidence-based guidance to facilitate safe and effective vaccination practices. AAP is a national professional organization representing pediatric physicians, and its immunization schedule is developed by pediatric experts and updated regularly to reflect current evidence and clinical best practices for immunizing children and adolescents. The AAP immunization schedule aligns with science-backed pediatric standards of care and provides detailed guidance that supports clinical decision-making in pediatric settings.

Clinicians should continue to follow all applicable state requirements, including the immunization requirements for school and camp entry (aligned with AAP recommendations), and reporting obligations, including documentation of administered immunizations in the Massachusetts Immunization Information System (MIIS).

DPH will continue to monitor national immunization policy updates and will communicate any additional guidance as needed.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619
617-624-6000 | mass.gov/dph

Thank you for your continued commitment to protecting the health of Massachusetts children and families.

Resources · The American Academy of Pediatrics Recommended Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule · Massachusetts Immunization Requirements for School and Camp Entry · Massachusetts Immunization Information System (MIIS) · AAP Communicating with Families and Promoting Vaccine Confidence · DPH recommended guidance for vaccines

Calendar of Events

NEW SALEM Library Saturday December 13th at 1pm, Part 3 of the Healthy Living Series. This session will focus on stress management and cognitive health.

NEW SALEM Thursday January 15th, The Friends of the New Salem Public Library are pleased to announce the 2026 season of Reading Aloud for Grownups will have three events, all on Thursday evenings. Save these dates: January 15, February 19, and March 19. Readings will be from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the library (with refreshments!) as well as simulcast on Zoom. Readers to be announced. Join us for an evening of short stories read with expression and delight. Email the Friends at nsfriendsoflibrary@gmail.com with questions.

WARWICK Library Non-Fiction Discussion Group - Thursday, Jan. 15th @ 7 pm: This discussion group is wide open: Could be something you're reading now or from long ago; science, history, memoirs, biographies; articles, books, newsletters, journals. It's all up for discussion at the new non-fiction discussion group. Designed for independent, asynchronous reading, we'll get together to share our favorite non-fiction reads and make recommendations. Come to share/discuss or just to listen and build your reading list.

WARWICK Town Hall Tuesday January 20th at noon, wellness clinic with our Public Health Nurse following the senior lunch

WARWICK Library Tuesday January 20th at 7pm, Blood Pressure and Heart Health presentation with our Public Health Nurse to launch their libraries with heart initiative.

WARWICK Library Monthly Short Story Hour - James Herriot, Jan. 22nd @ 7:30 pm: We'll read selections from Every Living Thing (2025), the fifth and final book in James Herriot's beloved series of memoirs about his life as a veterinarian in the Yorkshire Dales of England, published in 1992. This will be one of our occasional forays into non-fiction (though in the end, who can say what's truly fictitious—or not?). Come to read or just to listen.

WARWICK Library Lego Club returns! Sat. Jan. 24th - 10-11:30 am: Open to families with kids of all ages, including infants and toddlers! Legos are provided. Please note: This is not a drop-off program: Stay and play with your kids!

WENDELL Library Saturday January 24, 1-3 p.m.: Blood Pressure and Healthy Heart Workshop. Learn the Basics of Blood Pressure and Heart Health with the North Quabbin Health Collaborative as they introduce their new effort "Libraries with Heart". As part of this initiative the Wendell Free Library is working with the American Heart Association to provide 3 blood pressure cuffs available to lend by the library as part of our "Library of Things" Collection.

Calendar of Events Continued

WARWICK Library Author visit & Kid's program w/Louise Wannier - Sunday, Jan. 25th @ 1 pm: Author and environmental advocate Louise Wannier will read from her book series, Tree Spirits—an interactive picture book series for children ages 4-9. The reading will be followed by a fun, creative leave-behind activity. Louise is passionate about helping children connect with the natural world and each other. Through her engaging, hands-on presentations, she creates space for empathy, imagination, and meaningful conversations that nurture social-emotional growth.

WENDELL Library Saturday January 31: Jigsaw Puzzle Swap. 12-2 p.m.

WENDELL Library Tuesday February 3 at 6:30-8 pm: Community Resiliency. Please join Axis Lloyd and Clarence Richardson to talk and strategize about community resilience as a whole and what that looks like in Wendell.

WENDELL Library Friday Feb. 13 at 6:30 p.m. "Deforestation, climate, and the future of the Amazon." with Chris Neill. The Amazon rainforest covers parts of nine countries in South America and is the Earth's largest tropical forest. Across these nations, Amazon loses an area of forest equivalent to more than half the area of Massachusetts each year. The majority of existing forest, and forest loss, occur in Brazil. Clearing, for both small holder and industrial-scale agriculture, is the main driver of forest loss. However, longer dry seasons, increasing droughts, and more fire now contribute to widespread degradation of forests that threaten to "savannaize" large areas of remaining forests. Chris Neill has been studying the environmental consequences of deforestation and agricultural expansion in Brazil since 1992. Chris will talk about recent changes to Amazon agriculture, deforestation and climate and some of the interesting ways in which scientists investigate the consequences of deforestation and the effects of fire and drought on remaining forest. He will discuss how these interacting forces will likely affect the future of Amazon forests and what forest protection policies could best slow deforestation and forest degradation. Chris Neill is a Senior Scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center in Falmouth. He studies natural and restored ecosystems around the globe. He is interested in how changes in land use affect ecosystem function, particularly water and nutrient cycling, and our ability to restore impaired systems.

WENDELL Library Tuesday February 20 at 6:30 p.m.: Smartphone Skills: Get More From Your Phone. Beginner-friendly workshop for Android and iPhone users. Learn to adjust settings, use voice typing, navigate maps, and download helpful apps. Bring your phone and questions! Please register.

WENDELL Library Saturday March 28 1-4 p.m. Silk Magic Colors & Flowers: Silk painting Workshop with Lidia of SimpleArtForms: Explore your creative side and experiment with colors without fear of making a mistake. Come join this easy, magical, and relaxing adventure into the world of freedom and creativity, after which you will get a masterpiece created by your own hands. During this master class, you will tap into your creativity and grow your unique flower. Funded by a grant from the Wendell Cultural Council. 12 spots available, please register.

Community Food Access Resource List

Resource Name	Location	Days/Times	Contact
CommunityAction Center for Self Reliance Food Pantry	156 Main Street, Greenfield	Monday, Thursday, Friday: 11am-4pm (closed between 1-1:30pm each of these days), Tuesday: 11am-6pm (closed between 1-1:30pm), Closed on Wednesdays	413-773-5029
Good Neighbor Food Pantry	Old Town HallWendell, 6 Center St, Wendell	Sundays 11am-noon, Last Name A-K 1st and 3rd Sunday, Last Name L-Z 2nd and 4th Sunday	978-544-3775
The Salvation Army	107 Ridge Ave, Athol	Tuesday9am-noon, Everyother Tuesday delivery	978-249-8111
The Salvation Army	72 Chapman St, Greenfield	Monday9am-11am, Closed on Holidays	413-773-3154
Our LadyImmaculate Church	192 SchoolSt, Athol	Tuesdays 10am-1:30pm	978-249-6790
Greenfield Pop Pantry	2nd Congregation Church, 16 Court Sq, Greenfield	Tuesdays 4:30pm-5:30pm	413-774-4355
CommunityFood Pantryat AtholHigh School	2363 Main St, Athol(Located in the back of AHS)	Wednesdays, Summer hours 11am-1pm, Schoolyear hours 3pm-5pm	978-249-2435 ext 314
AtholSenior Center	82 Freedom St, Athol	Wednesdays 11am-11:45am	978-249-8986
Orange Councilon Aging	St Mary's, 20 West Myrtle St, Orange	Wednesdays 10am-11am	978-544-3481
Turners Falls Mobile Food Bank	62 5th St, Turners Falls	3rd Wednesdayof Month 1:30pm-2:30pm	413-419-0079
Orange Food Pantry	81 East River St, Orange	Thursdays 10am-3pm (If it's a holidaythen it will be open on Wednesday. Deliveries on Fridayfor Athol/Orange)	978-544-2149 (call for deliveries)
St Vincent De Paul/St Mary's Food Pantry	19 Congress St, Orange	Open by appointment only	978-544-6814
Marion's Food Pantry	On the Royalston Common	Open by appointment only	978-895-7887
The Salvation Army	72 Chapman St, Greenfield	Monday-Friday8:30am-9:30am (Breakfast) 11am-12:30pm (Lunch)	413-773-3154
Our Ladyof Peace Church	90 7th St, Turners Falls	Mondays 4pm-5:30pm (Distributing hot meals and gorcerybags to go from the sidewalk in front of the church)	413-863-2585
The Salvation Army	107 Ridge Ave, Athol	Tuesdays 4:30pm-5:30pm (Dine in/Delivery)	978-249-8111
Second Congregational Church	16 Court Square, Greenfield	Tuesdays and Wednesdays 4:45pm-5:45pm, hot meals to go Tuesdays and Wednesdays on the side driveway	413-774-4355
AtholSenior Center	82 Freedom St, Athol	Tuesdays and Wednesdays at noon (Must RSVP the daybefore). For individuals 60 and over and/or disabled. Senior Dining at Lynn's Luncheonette. Enjoylunch with others. A \$3.50 donation is welcome	978-249-8986 Reserve your mealby9am the daybefore you dine
St Frances Church Hall	101 Main St, Athol	Wednesdays (September-May) doors open at 5pm	978-249-7304
Orange United Methodist Church	104 S Main St, Orange	Thursdays 4:30pm-5:15pm (Distributing ready-made meals to heat up at home. We offer deliveries for meals and pantrybags by applications)	413-772-1033 https://www.fc cmp.org/comm unity-meals/orange/
Trinitarian Congregational Church	147 Main St, Northfield	Fourth Thursday4:30pm (Take out meals only. You must RSVP)	413-498-5839
AtholCongregational Church	1225 Chestnut St, Athol	First Fridayof the Month, doors open at 5pm, dinner at 5:30pm (Must RSVP byTuesdayfor a mealon Friday)	978-249-6202
Meals on Wheels	AtholSenior Center & Orange Councilon Aging	LifePath Inc of Greenfield provides home delivered (noontime) meals to homebound seniors, age 60 and older and/or disabled, who are not able to prepare nutritious and balanced meals for themselves.	1-800-732-4636 (call to see if eligible)

Senior Dining Community Resource List

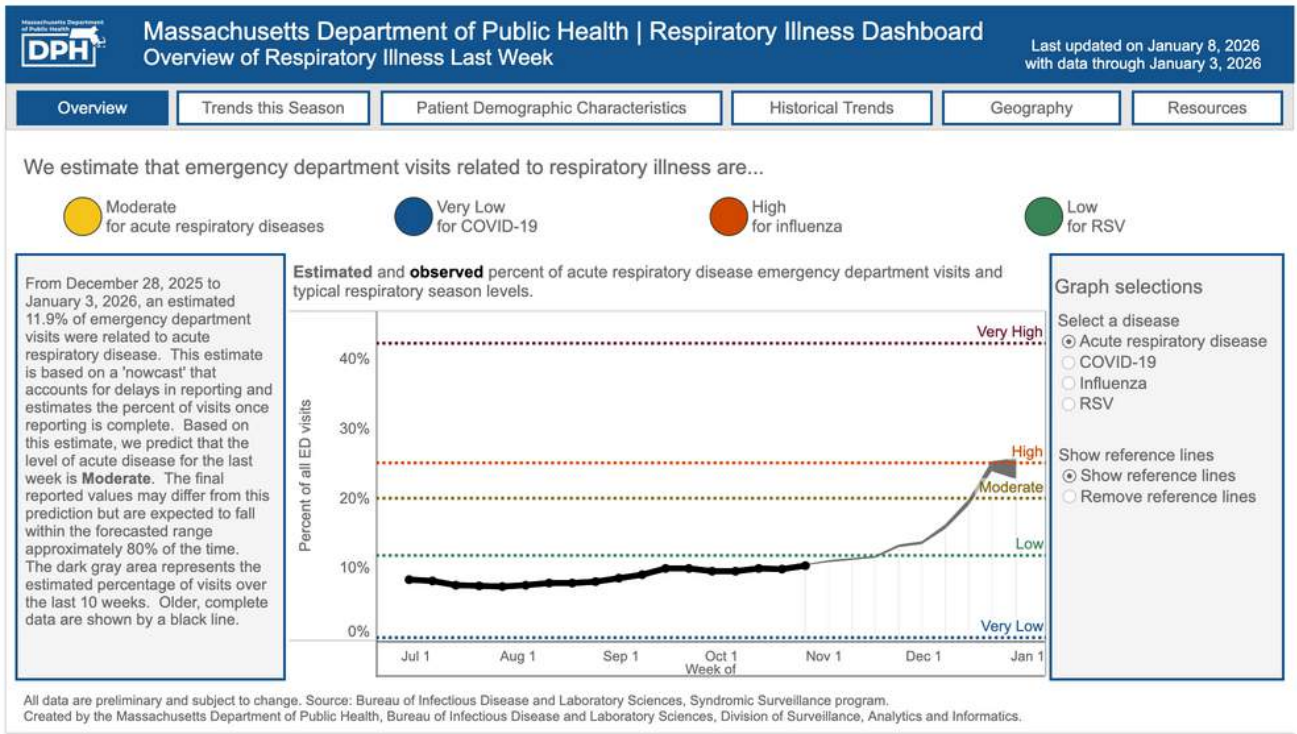
Senior Dining Center or Luncheon Club Location	Serving Days Schedule	Contact/Phone Reservations
Athol Senior Center 82 Freedom Street Athol, MA 01331	Tuesday & Wednesday Congregate	(978) 249-9001
New Salem Luncheon Club Central Congregational Church 22 South Main St. New Salem, MA 01355	2nd & 4th Friday of the month Congregate Dine-in	(978) 575-0116
Petersham Luncheon Club Town Hall Petersham, MA 01366	Wednesday Congregate and Grab and Go	978-821-5549
Phillipston Luncheon Club 1st Congregational Church The Common Phillipston, MA 01331	1st & 3rd Tuesday of the month Congregate Dine-in Closed December to March	(978) 407-9504
Royalston Luncheon Club Town Hall Royalston, MA 01368	Wednesday Congregate Dine-in	978-249-8957

NQHC COVID-19 and Other Reportable Diseases

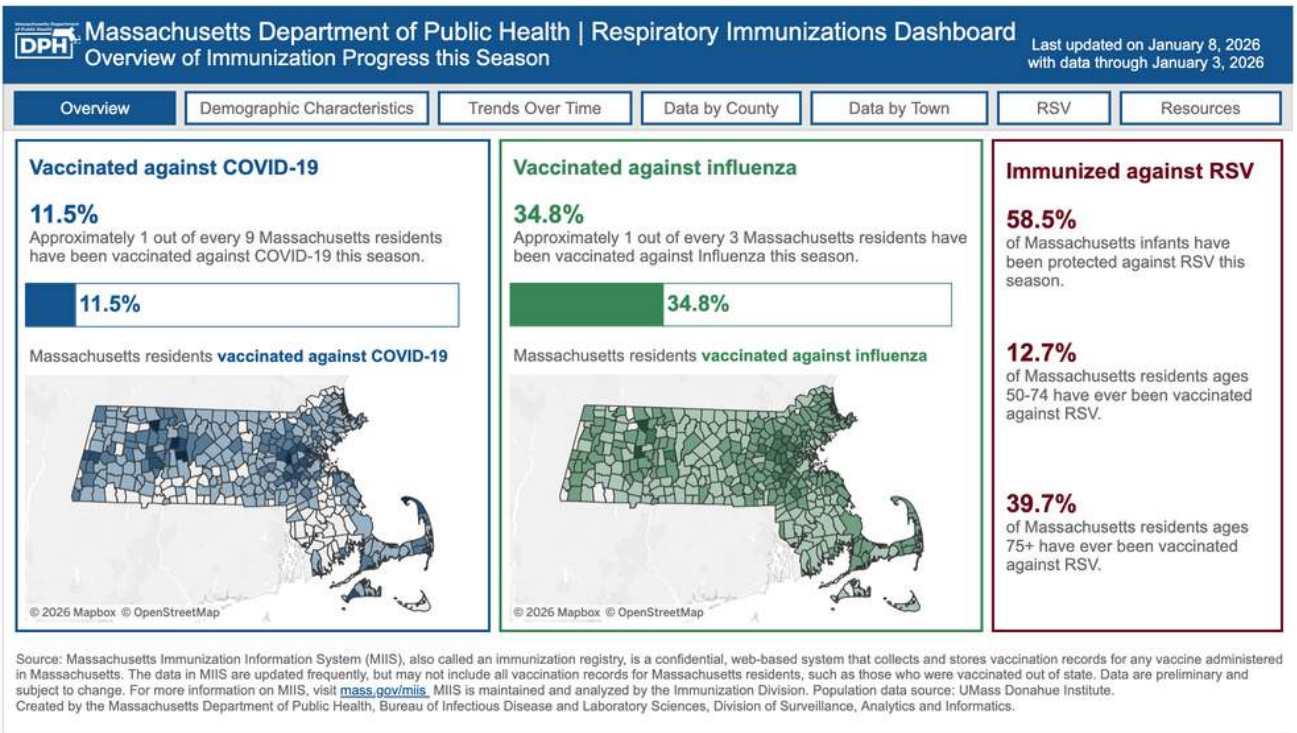
In the the one-week period of December 29th through January 4th, 2025:

- 1 official cases of COVID-19 within the district
- 21 cases of influenza

Respiratory Illness Reporting

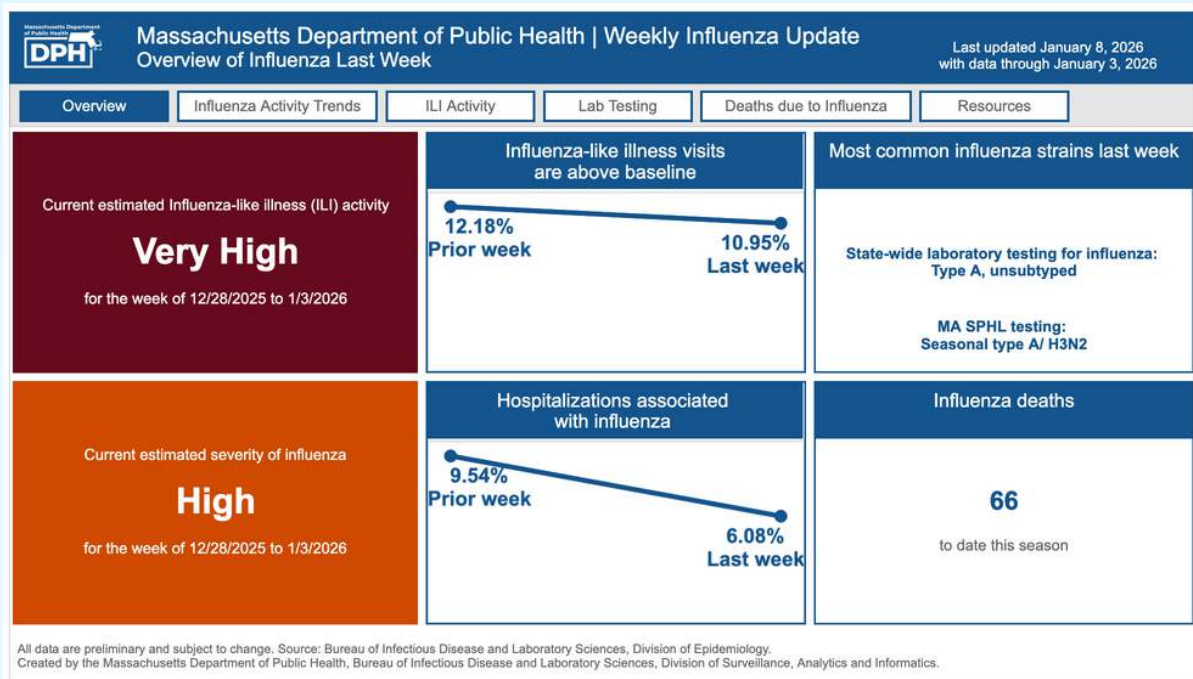


Here is the overall percentages if individuals in Massachusetts immunized against Covid-19 and Influenza

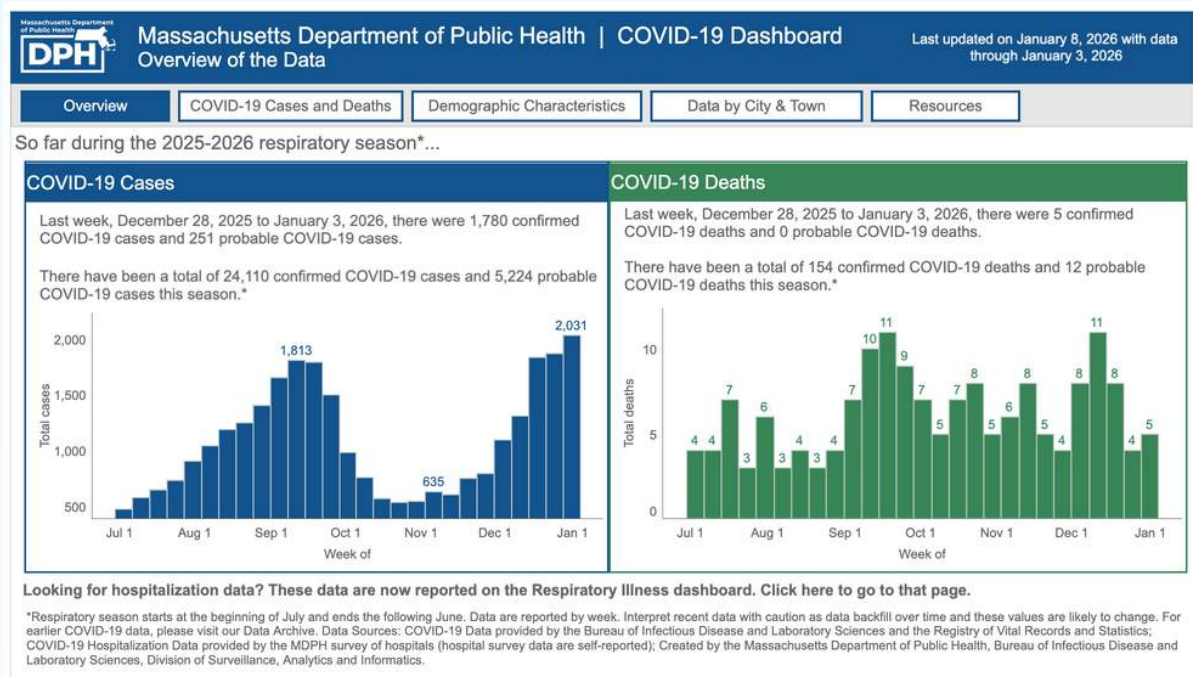


The Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Influenza Reporting – Influenza rate is at Very High and Severity is at High



COVID-19 Reporting – Number of cases are on the rise again



At this point in time there have been no additional updates to the Massachusetts Covid guidelines. The latest version can be seen at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/staying-home-to-prevent-the-spread-of-respiratory-viruses>

Report created by Christy Page: cpage@townoforange.org
Next newsletter will be Friday January 9th, 2026



NQHC Nurse Update



Post Partum Support

Our **FREE** Postpartum Visiting Program provides personalized care, whether you are adjusting to a new baby, coping with infant loss, or in recovery from substance use. **We connect you with local resources for ongoing support.**

What We Provide

- Prenatal and postpartum support and visits
- Education on health, safety, and wellness for you and your baby.
- Demonstrations and guidance from professionals.
- A free gift bag with essentials, educational resources, and helpful freebies.

Harm Reduction Services/ Program Includes:

- Naloxone and Overdose Response Trainings
- Free Naloxone and Fentanyl Test strip kits
- Syringe Exchange
- Connection to resources for treatment options and recovery

Upcoming events:

- January 10th - New Salem Library - Healthy Living Series Part 2 of 2 - 1pm
- January 14th at Senior Wednesdays at the New Salem Library during their tea and topics we will be discussing How to Stay Safe in Sever cold Weather 2pm
- January 20th- Wellness Clinic at the Senior Lunch in Warwick 12pm
- January 20th - Warwick Library Presentation on Heart Health and Blood Pressure to launch the Libraries with Heart Initiative 7pm
- January 24th - Wendell Library - Presentation on Heart Health and Blood Pressure to launch their Libraries with Heart Initiative 1pm

Coming Soon:

BLS Certifications and Renewals
Heartsaver courses

CALL US: 413-500-6414

EMAIL: SPIRAGIS@TOWNOFORANGE.ORG

VISIT US AT: [HTTPS://WWW.NORTHQUABBINHC.ORG/NQHCPVP](https://www.northquabbinhc.org/nqhcpvp)

2026 Beyond Trauma: A Healing Journey

**A Collaboration
Between the Brick
House & the
Salasin Project**

**Wednesdays 1-2:30 starting
January 14th & running
through March 4th**

Hybrid group, live at
The Salasin Project
33 Riddell St #1, Greenfield, MA
Zoom option available

A Healing Journey is a confidential support and discussion group that explores the impact of interpersonal violence and trauma on individuals. The group will explore ideas for creating safety and developing healthy relationships while sharing healing activities for the mind, body, and spirit. This group is open to people who identify as female, femme, or non-binary/trans and relate to aspects of womanhood, and are age 18 or older.

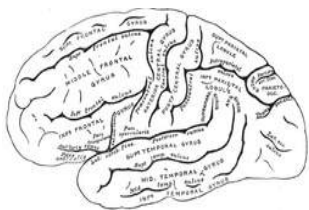
Registration Required.

To register, please call either **Stacey**
(413-800-2496) or **Lynn** (413-575-0042)

For more information, please email
slangknecht@brickhousecommunity.org, or
lynn-salasin@wmtcinfo.org



www.brickhousecommunity.org



MEMORY CAFE

For All

A Memory Cafe is a free social gathering for people living with changes in their memory or thinking, and the people who care about them. Memory Cafés focus on people, not medical conditions. No one is asked if they have a diagnosis. We invite you to join in community, and to enjoy some music or other activity, some food and friendly informal visiting.

Please join us:

Monday, January 12, 2026 from 11:00-12:30
WENDELL COMMUNITY AND SENIOR CENTER
2 Lockes Village Road, Wendell Center

This Cafe is hosted by the Wendell COA, with support from Village Neighbors, and the Neighborhood Dementia Support Group. Please RSVP to Nancy Spittle at 978-544-6760 so we have food and seating for all.

For support with memory loss, contact Village Neighbors at 413-345-6894 or email us at generalinfo@villageneighbors.org

This Age & Dementia Friendly Community Award is supported by LifePath, with funding from the Point32 Health Foundation and the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Network, a project of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG).



SERVING ORANGE, NEW SALEM, WENDELL, WARWICK, & PETERSHAM

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.



**DROP-IN HOURS
AT
NEW SALEM
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

**EVERY FOURTH
TUESDAY OF THE
MONTH FROM
3:00-5:00PM**

DROP IN & MEET YOUR COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORKER

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS AROUND ACCESSING HELP?

NORTH QUABBIN HEALTH COLLABORATIVE'S SOCIAL WORKER CAN ANSWER QUESTIONS AND CONNECT YOU TO AVAILABLE RESOURCES & BENEFITS TO MEET YOUR NEEDS INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO:

FOOD
HOUSING & HOME REPAIR
TRANSPORTATION
HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH
SUPPORT FOR ELDERLY OR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN
SUPPORT GROUPS
& MORE

FREE &
CONFIDENTIAL
SUPPORT

RACHEL PURINTON, MSW
413-500-6414
RPURINTON@TOWNOFORANGE.ORG

NQHC

**COMING
SOON:**

**CPR
TRAININGS**



(both renewals and
certifications)

