



Department of Health

Three Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908-5097

TTY: 711
www.health.ri.gov

June 10, 2010

Dear College/University Family:

Each year in the United States, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from influenza (flu) complications, and about 36,000 people die from the flu. Flu can be very serious, particularly on college campuses. Close living quarters, communal bathrooms, and high social activity make college campuses ideal settings for the spread of flu viruses. Recent data show that about one in four college students will get the flu during flu season. High fever, chills, and body aches can last for as long as two weeks, causing students to miss classes, sporting events, and other important activities. Vaccination against the flu is the most effective way to protect students from getting sick.

National public health officials recently recommended universal vaccination to prevent flu. This means flu vaccine is now recommended for all people six months of age and older. The H1N1 flu virus hit college students particularly hard during the 2009-2010 flu season, and it is expected to continue circulating next year. In preparation, vaccine manufacturers have included the H1N1 flu vaccine strain in the 2010-2011 seasonal flu vaccine. To protect our college students *before* the 2010-2011 flu season arrives, the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) is partnering with colleges and universities to identify ways to engage students early on in our vaccination campaign.

Last season, Rhode Island achieved the highest overall H1N1 flu vaccination rates in the country. Through a targeted, statewide campaign, we provided vaccine to high-risk groups at community, school, and campus-based clinics. By the end of the flu season, we vaccinated over 10,000 college students against H1N1 flu! Although these numbers are admirable, we need to do more to increase our vaccination rates this coming year. High vaccine coverage rates in colleges help create the "herd" immunity needed to reduce the spread of flu among students, faculty, and campus community members.

In Rhode Island, all colleges and universities make flu vaccine available to students through college health services and scheduled clinics. Colleges provide students with information about flu vaccination opportunities in a variety of ways, including email, posters, campus news, and class announcements.

I ask you to support Rhode Island's effort to be a "Flu Free State" in 2010-2011 by encouraging your children to receive the flu vaccine this fall. Serve as a role model by receiving your flu vaccine. Help protect Rhode Island's students, families, and college communities from the flu by encouraging your children to be vaccinated against the flu on campus. For more information, visit www.health.ri.gov/flu or call the HEALTH Information Line at 401-222-5960 / RI Relay 711.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Gifford".

David Gifford, MD, MPH
Director, Rhode Island Department of Health