

Newton Public Schools

October 2025



Live Well, Work Well

What to Know About This Year's Flu Season

The influenza (flu) season in the United States lasts from October through May, with peak flu activity between December and March.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 47 million to 82 million flu illnesses occurred during the 2024-25 season. Data suggested that flu activity was at its highest level in more than 15 years.

Flu season in the Southern Hemisphere often indicates what's to come in the United States, where data revealed higher hospitalizations during the 2025 flu season. With the potential for this year's flu season to be severe in the United States, vaccination remains the most effective way to prevent the flu, especially severe disease and hospitalization.

How to Stay Healthy

The flu can cause serious complications for people of any age, but children and older adults are especially vulnerable. There is much you can do to keep your household healthy this flu season. Consider these

helpful tips to get started:

- Get a flu shot. The CDC recommends that most aged 6 months and over should be vaccinated.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay away from others when you feel unwell. Flu, cold, and COVID-19 symptoms are similar, so doctors say it's best to get tested to determine what you have.
- Wash your hands often using soap and warm water. If those are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Get seven to nine hours of [quality sleep](#) each night to boost your immune system.
- Exercise regularly to strengthen your body and make it more resilient against infections.
- Stay hydrated and eat a [balanced diet](#).

Experts suggest vaccination by the end of October. Log into your [Aetna online account](#) or visit [aetna.com](#) to find a vaccine provider near you. [Click here](#) to learn more about vaccines!

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The Benefits of Fast Walking

While it's recommended that people commit to 150 minutes of moderate activity per week to notice sufficient [health benefits](#), a new study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that fast walking for just 15 minutes daily could have the same benefits.

Study participants who fast walked for at least 15 minutes every day saw a nearly 20% reduction in premature death compared with a 4% reduction among participants who walked slowly for a total of more than three hours each day.

Generally, you can tell you're fast walking when you can talk but not sing. Remember to maintain good walking form by standing tall with your shoulders back and swinging your arms (in opposition to your foot movement). If you want to take it one step further, try nasal breathing (inhale and exhale through your nose) to help regulate blood pressure while walking.

In addition to the study's findings, consider the following benefits of walking, regardless of speed:

- Weight maintenance
- Reduced body fat
- Increased cardiovascular fitness
- Improved endurance
- Higher energy levels
- Better mood, memory, and sleep
- Strengthened immune system
- Decreased stress

To learn more about incorporating walking into your routine, talk to your doctor and discuss what works best for you. **Visit our *Benefits Online* website for more wellness info: [click here](#).**

Stocking a Nutritious Kitchen

You don't need to master the art of meal planning to eat well during the week. It can be as simple as stocking your kitchen with mealtime building blocks. By keeping a well-rounded selection of pantry, fridge, and freezer staples on hand, you can create balanced meals in minutes and avoid the temptation of less nutritious options. Consider the following nutritious items:

- **Canned chickpeas** can easily be added to soups or mashed with seasonings for extra protein and fiber.
- **Chicken breast** is a great protein to build a meal around. You could make pasta, soups, casseroles, sandwiches, and more.

- **Extra-firm tofu** is full of plant-based protein and calcium. Its neutral flavor makes it great for stir-fries and curries.
- **Quinoa or lentils** are versatile options to round off meals. They are packed with fiber and protein.
- **Whole-wheat spaghetti** is a great last-minute meal idea. It has a sizable dose of fiber and helps reduce cholesterol.
- **Frozen spinach** is easily used in egg dishes, pasta, and smoothies. It's also packed with four times the nutrients of fresh spinach.

By stocking your kitchen with nutritious staples, you'll always have the tools to build meals that [nourish your body](#) and fit your lifestyle.

Recipe of the Month

Pumpkin Ricotta Stuffed Shells

Makes: 12 servings

Ingredients

- 6 oz. jumbo pasta shells (about 12 jumbo pasta shells)
- 1 ¼ cups part-skim ricotta cheese
- ¾ cup pumpkin
- ½ tsp. garlic powder (or 2 cloves garlic, minced)
- 2 Tbsp. basil
- ¼ tsp. dried sage
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese (divided)
- 1 cup low-sodium spaghetti sauce

Preparations

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Cook the pasta shells according to package directions. Drain and place each on a baking sheet to cool.
3. In a medium bowl, stir together the ricotta, pumpkin, spices, and all but 1 tablespoon of the parmesan cheese. Reserve the remaining 1 tablespoon of cheese for topping.
4. Spread the pasta sauce in the bottom of a baking dish that holds all the shells in a single layer. Fill each shell with about 3 tablespoons of pumpkin mixture and place shells close together on top of the sauce.
5. Cover the pan with foil and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the foil, sprinkle with remaining parmesan, and bake for 15 minutes more.

Nutritional Information

(per serving)

Total calories	128
Total fat	4 g
Protein	7 g
Sodium	211 mg
Carbohydrate	17 g
Dietary fiber	2 g
Saturated fat	2 g
Total sugars	2 g

Source: MyPlate

Annual Notice

Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act of 1998

Did you know that your plan, as required by the Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act of 1998, provides benefits for mastectomy-related services, including all stages of reconstruction and surgery to achieve symmetry between the breasts, prostheses, and complications resulting from a mastectomy, including lymphedema?

Call your benefits administrator or speak with your doctor for information.