



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## Even Healthy People Can Get the Flu: H1N1 Survivor Advocates for Flu Shots

Vermont Department of Health observes National Influenza Vaccination Week, Dec. 5-11 – Urges everyone 6 months and older to get vaccinated!

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MILTON – Eric Crocker thought he was suffering from a severe cold when he entered the Fletcher Allen Healthcare emergency room on November 5, 2009. As a nurse checked his oxygen level, it was apparent he was in respiratory failure. He spent the next 71 days in the Intensive Care Unit diagnosed with an H1N1 influenza infection deep in his lungs.

“I don’t remember anything until I woke up in December and I was so weak I could not scratch my head,” Crocker said. “One of the scariest things was I had to learn to walk again. I lost 70 pounds and 40 percent of my muscle mass.”

Crocker, 42, of Milton, tells everyone he knows to get their flu shot. People don’t think much about flu until they know someone who gets the flu, Crocker said. The Health Department works to remind Vermonters each year that even healthy young people can get the flu, and getting the flu shot or spray is the first and best way to protect yourself and everyone around you.

The 2010-2011 vaccine protects against three strains of the virus, including the 2009 H1N1 flu. This is the first year that annual flu vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older, and this season’s vaccine is widely available in physician offices and public settings.

Crocker says that last year “I had my seasonal flu shot a week before Halloween, but they didn’t have any H1N1. I didn’t expect to get it, no one was sick at home, and I consider myself to be a healthy person. I don’t smoke or drink or do drugs and I am always on the go, constantly working, doing construction on the house....

“It took me 10 days after I came out of the coma to figure out where I was, and I couldn’t talk because I was on a ventilator.”

Even today, Crocker’s lung capacity is half what it was before he had the flu. He is back to work 20 hours a week and still needs oxygen to make it through the day. A high-speed ventilator is one of the treatments credited with saving his life, as well as the skilled care of a team of physicians, nurses and hospital staff who tended to him day after day, week after week.

Crocker said the people who treated him, including physicians and care providers while he was in isolation, never gave up on him. His primary physician, Dr. Frank Landry, considers Crocker’s survival to be a miracle.

“I thank Dr. Landry every time I see him. On Nov. 5 of this year my wife and I went back to the ICU,” Crocker said. “You can never thank everybody who worked all those different shifts, but we brought them some cakes that said, ‘Thank you from Eric Crocker.’ I run into people on the street who stop me and say, ‘I worked on you’ – and I say, ‘Thank you for everything.’ My family and I wish everyone would get vaccinated so no one would have to go through what me and my family have gone through.”

### Flu Vaccine Facts:

- The flu vaccine is updated each season to protect against the three flu viruses that research shows will cause the most illness. At this time, the vaccine is well matched to the flu strains now circulating in the U.S.
- Because flu viruses are always changing, last season’s flu vaccine may not protect against new viruses, and getting vaccinated every year is the only way to stay protected each season.
- The flu shot cannot give you the flu. Flu vaccine is used to prevent the flu, not treat the flu. Over the past 50 years, flu vaccines have been shown to be safe.

With flu activity increasing, family and friends gathering for the holidays, and cold weather setting in, now is a great time to get a flu vaccine.

For more information about the flu, go to [flu.gov](http://flu.gov), [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov) or dial 2-1-1.

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