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PRESS RELEASE

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UMass health center receives flu surveillance award

AMHERST, Mass. – University Health Services (UHS), UMass Amherst's campus health center, has been recognized by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) for its contributions to state and national influenza surveillance.

UHS public health nurse Ann Becker, R.N., accepted the award from the MDPH Influenza Surveillance Team at a regional immunization conference April 11 in Worcester.

UHS is a sentinel site for influenza surveillance in Massachusetts. From October through May, these sites file weekly reports with the national Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on the number of patients with influenza-like illnesses seen at their facilities. This data is combined with information from laboratories, cities and states to provide a nationwide view of influenza activity. The CDC's influenza surveillance system allows the agency to determine where flu is occurring, identify active forms of the virus, monitor changes in viruses, track illness related to influenza and measure flu's impact on death rates.

Becker, who collects and reports UHS' data, said the 2005-2006 flu season was moderate in intensity, with a later peak than usual. The greatest flu activity in Massachusetts was seen in mid-March, although new cases are still occurring.

UHS vaccinated 20% more patients this season, an increase Becker attributes to availability of vaccine and public awareness of flu prevention. Although the season is winding down, the CDC's Dr. William Atkinson, keynote speaker at the conference, encouraged providers to continue vaccinating patients. "Flu is still occurring throughout the U.S.; it's not too late to vaccinate," he said.

UHS, UMass Amherst's fully accredited health center, serves students, faculty and staff. The center offers comprehensive care, referral and education services, with a special focus on the health needs and concerns of students.

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INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY:

- Ann Becker, R.N., public health nurse, UHS