



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

JUDYANN BIGBY, MD
SECRETARY

JOHN AUERBACH
COMMISSIONER

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FURTHER INFORMATION:
Donna Rheume (617) 624-5006

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

**MASSACHUSETTS HEALTH OFFICIALS ISSUE ADVISORY TO PUBLIC AND
HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Increase in domestic violence deaths spur call to action.

BOSTON -- Driven by recent domestic violence killings, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today issued a public health advisory on domestic violence.

Public health advisories are tools reserved for communicating urgent information to the public on health issues facing the community. Such advisories define the scope of the problem and provide important information on prevention and treatment.

“We use these advisories to alert the public and health care providers throughout our state to pay attention to a pressing health issue,” said DPH Commissioner John Auerbach. “The recent spate of domestic violence-related deaths in Massachusetts is disturbing. Domestic violence in any form is unacceptable and we can all play a part in preventing abuse from happening to anyone in the Commonwealth.”

Commissioner Auerbach added that he wanted to assure the public and health care providers that resources exist for victim advocacy, counseling and shelter services, as well as programs to hold batterers accountable and prevent domestic violence incidents. In addition to issuing the advisory through the media, DPH will also send a copy to all health care facilities in Massachusetts.

The Problem

The statistics on the impact of domestic violence are sobering, and point clearly to the extent of this serious public health problem.

- The number of domestic violence deaths in Massachusetts was nearly three times higher in 2007 than in 2005. According to statistics maintained by Jane Doe, Inc., there were 15 murders and four domestic violence-related suicides in 2005, 28 murders and three suicides in 2006, and 42 murders and 13 suicides in 2007.
- Additionally, according to Jane Doe, Inc., a total of 31 children were directly impacted by domestic violence in 2007. Five children were killed, 13 orphaned, 11 lost their mother, and two lost their father.
- So far in 2008, Jane Doe, Inc. reports that there have been 19 domestic violence homicides and five domestic violence-related suicides for a total of 24 deaths.

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- A 2003 CDC study estimated that each year domestic violence involving an intimate partner results in 1,200 deaths, two million injuries among women, and 600,000 injuries among men.
- That same CDC study estimated the costs of intimate partner violence exceeded \$5.8 billion per year, including direct medical and mental health costs for victims and lost productivity.

Help for Victims and their Children

Health officials stressed that more can be done by government, the public, health care providers, and the media to inform victims about services that can help them.

“There are important messages that we can give victims of domestic violence. First, what they are going through is not their fault, next, that violence affects their health in many ways, and finally, that help is available and healing is possible,” said Carlene Pavlos, Director of the Violence and Injury Prevention Program at DPH.

If you or someone you care about is a victim of domestic violence, you are not alone. Programs across Massachusetts can provide free, confidential services to victims.

- **If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.**
- For help you can also contact SafeLink, the Massachusetts Statewide Domestic Violence hotline. The SafeLink hotline is staffed 24 hours a day with trained domestic violence counselors who can provide help in multiple languages. **If you need help, call the SafeLink toll-free number: 1-877-785-2020.**

Information for people who are using violence in relationships

If you are using violent, controlling and/or intimidating behaviors, your entire family including your children are impacted. You can stop. There are educational programs available to help you to recognize and change your behavior. People who attend batterer intervention programs are less likely to commit new acts of violence or to violate restraining orders. For information on a Batterer Intervention Program near you, call 617-624-5497.

Information for the Public

Domestic violence is sometimes referred to as a “silent crime” because victims are often too afraid to come forward, and friends and family often do not want to become involved in something that they consider a personal matter. The abuse can take many different forms including physical, sexual, economic, emotional and psychological abuse, and is often a *pattern* of these behaviors. Domestic violence is a crime and stopping it requires help from family, friends and neighbors.

Tips for the public to help identify and prevent domestic violence in their community:

- Educate yourself on what domestic violence is and how to stop it. There are many resources available including these web sites:
http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/ipv_factsheet.pdf ;
<http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/pledge.htm>;
<http://endabuse.org/programs/publiceducation/>
- Call the SafeLink number (1-877-785-2020). They can give you advice if you are trying to help someone you know who is being abused. They can also provide you the name of a Batterer Intervention Program if you are concerned about someone’s jealous, obsessive, controlling or abusive behavior.

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- If you hear or see a domestic violence crime, call 9-1-1 and report it to the police. If possible, write down specifics as to location, license plate numbers, and any other information that may be of help to law enforcement.
- Speak out against domestic violence with your family, neighbors, and friends. Let people know in your house of worship, at work, school, and elsewhere that domestic violence is unacceptable in your community and share tips on how to identify and prevent it from happening.
- If you belong to a civic organization, invite a speaker from your local domestic violence program to educate your group on the issue. Ask your local library to prominently display books on domestic violence and resource information on how victims can get the help they need.
- Volunteer or donate to a domestic violence organization in your area. To find one close by, contact Jane Doe, Inc. at 617-248-0922, or visit www.janedoe.org.

Information for Health Care Providers

Domestic violence is a serious, underlying cause of poor health for many people in the Commonwealth. Health care providers can play an important role in identifying and responding to victims of domestic violence through routine screening and appropriate referral.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health recommends routine screening for domestic violence victimization in all health care settings. Providers should be appropriately trained in the dynamics of domestic violence in order to screen appropriately, and should be well-versed in appropriate and safe referrals for those victims who come forward.

Appropriate screening and referral has several important health implications:

- An 11-city study of victims of intimate partner homicide and attempted homicide published in 2001 found that the majority of victims (74% of the nearly 240 murdered women and 88% of victims of attempted homicide) had been seen in hospital ERs for some ailment at some point in the year before the incident. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of these women were evaluated in ERs, hospital in-patient or ambulatory care settings for injuries related to the domestic violence. (Sharps, et al, "Health care providers missed opportunities for preventing femicide", *Prev. Med.* 2001; 33:373-380). Identification, assessment and referral of these victims could have been life-saving.
- The February 8, 2008 edition of *Mortality and Morbidity Weekly* reported dramatic prevalence of violent victimization (1,200 deaths and two million injuries to women from intimate partner violence each year, and nearly 600,000 injuries to men) and further reported that women who have experienced partner violence are at significantly greater risk for heart disease, stroke, asthma, arthritis, heavy drinking, risky sex, and for needing a cane or wheelchair than women who have not experienced partner violence. Identification and referral can have important implications for a myriad of health risks, as well as implications for reducing health care costs.
- For information on training resources and screening and referral protocols for health care providers, go to:
 - <http://www.endabuse.org/programs/healthcare/> - materials at this website include the National Consensus Guidelines on Identifying and Responding to Domestic Violence Victimization in Health Care Settings

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- www.massmed.org (see the public health materials regarding partner violence)
- Or call the Department of Public Health's Division of Violence and Injury Prevention at (617) 624-5463.

- For a listing of local programs that can provide critical victim services to patients/clients go to:
<http://www.janedoe.org/safety.htm>

Information for safely addressing someone you think might be abusive and controlling

If you recognize someone who exhibits behaviors such as jealousy, obsession or possessiveness, take steps to assist that person to get help. This can be critical to the safety and well-being of intimate partners and families. Talk with others about your options. Call your local Batterer Intervention Program, SAFELINK 1-877-785-2020 or the DPH Batterer Intervention Program Services at 617-624-5497 for help.

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