

An E-mail a Day Keeps the Doctor Away

MINNESOTA With cold and flu season in full swing, many Minnesotans are doing what they can to stay healthy – including reading their e-mail. No, they haven't gotten flu viruses confused with computer viruses. Rather, visitors to the Minnesota Department of Health's (MDH) Web site (www.health.state.mn.us) can now sign up to receive weekly email notices monitoring the influenza activity for the state as well as any other health alerts currently in effect.

MDH launched its e-mail subscription management system, *GovDelivery*®, last July. Since that time, the department has sent out nearly 173,000 e-mail alerts to more than 5,600 subscribers – and that number continues to grow. The e-mail alerts direct the subscriber back to the MDH Web site, which not only increases traffic to the site, but helps keep the general public better informed about important public health issues.

In addition to public health content, subscribers can sign up to receive updates from more than 10 categories, including news releases, newsletters and publications, daily news clips, provider resources, and training and educational opportunities. Whenever new content from one of these categories is posted to the site, an e-mail alert is automatically generated and sent to the subscriber (after administrator approval).

The feedback from citizens about this new service has been extremely positive. In fact, MDH has increased its subscriber base by 50 percent. “We are able to communicate with more citizens, more consistently than ever before,” says John Stieger, MDH Communications Director. “When we are dealing with something as serious as influenza, it is critical that we get information out in a timely manner so citizens can protect themselves – and the e-mail alerts help us accomplish this.”