

## **Building a Healthier Future**

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When it comes to creating systems that work, Massachusetts understands the importance of building a public health infrastructure. This dates back to the 1700's when Boston founded the nation's first health department. Paul Revere was the first Health Officer and he took strides to improve the health of our citizens by recognizing the importance of preventing disease outbreaks which saved lives. The Commonwealth has invested in creating government systems and infrastructure that offer services to our community and as such, Massachusetts has the reputation as innovative and forward thinking. Westwood has taken on this mentality in everything we do from planning for a public health emergency to creating a competitive educational system for our children to improving the quality of life in our neighborhoods, and cutting down on our carbon footprint. We proved this in 2009, when CNN Money Magazine ranked Westwood 13th on its list of the *100 Best Places to Live in the United States*.

We must continue to invest in our public health system. The recent boil water order for the Greater Boston area in May demonstrated how critical public health infrastructure and preparedness is to keeping our communities safe and healthy. Although Westwood was not affected, neighboring towns were and Westwood was able to come to their aid because we have worked closely with the surrounding communities to practice for real life emergencies through drills and trainings as well as making sure there are plans in place to provide this type of support during an emergency. These actions are what is known as *preparedness* and we all have a part to play and an obligation to make sure our community is ready for any emergency.

As a Westwood resident, you too can be a part of this movement by preparing now so that you, your family and neighbors know what to do during an emergency. September is National Preparedness Month. To celebrate, the Health Department recommends that residents follow these 5 tips to ensure that we all are prepared for an emergency:

- **Preparedness begins at home:** Make a plan and a kit for you and/or your family. To get you started, visit these website for more information: [www.townhall.westwood.ma.us](http://www.townhall.westwood.ma.us) or [www.ready.gov/america](http://www.ready.gov/america) or [www.ready.gov/america/getakit/](http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit/)
- **Give Back to the Community:** Be on the front lines of public health emergencies and volunteer with the Westwood Medical Reserve Corp (MRC). Westwood needs both medical professionals and non-medical volunteers. To become a volunteer, contact the Health Department at 781.320.1027 or visit the Medical Reserve Corp Website at: [www.region4bvolunteer.org/](http://www.region4bvolunteer.org/)
- **Make local connections:** Contact the Westwood Health Department to learn about upcoming flu clinics or updates on local emergencies. You can contact us at 781.320.1027 or visit our website at [www.townhall.westwood.ma.us/](http://www.townhall.westwood.ma.us/) and click on *Board of Health*
- **Help others in need:** When emergencies happen, make sure to remember people in your community who might need additional assistance. Whether it's your next door neighbor who might be homebound due to a disability or your grandmother who lives by herself, give them a call or a visit to make sure they are safe.

- **Stay Informed:** Stay updated on public health issues that might affect your community. Visit the Massachusetts State blog that provides news and advisories on what's happening around you. Visit this website for more information: <http://publichealth.blog.state.ma.us/public-health-advisories/>

A prepared community is a healthy community. I urge you to follow these 5 tips to be prepared, to stay informed and to be ready for any emergency.

*Linda Shea is the Health Director for the Westwood Board of Health. The Westwood Board of Health is part of Emergency Preparedness Region 4b, which is made up of 27 local health departments in the Greater Boston area.*

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