Wednesday, March 25, 2020
COVID-19 Response Command Center
Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

Situation Update

State Actions in Today's Report:

- New Case Information Released (Link in sidebar.)
- Governor Extends School & Non-Emergency Daycare Closures to 5/4
- Housing Stability Measures for Vulnerable Populations Announced
- Expert Advisory Board to Support MA Response
- DPH Order to Assist Older Adults and Provide Public Health Guidance for Grocery Stores & Pharmacies
- MassHealth Launches PCA Hotline to Help MassHealth Members
- EOHED Develops FAQ For Businesses on Essential Services
- DEP Order on Solid Waste and Recycling
- MBTA Makes Changes to Commuter Rail Schedule to Meet Demands of Health Care and Other Essential Responders
- Continuing Need for Red Cross Blood Donations

Helpful Links:

- Mass.Gov/covid19
- Mass.Gov/MEMA
- Complete List of Emergency Orders & Guidance

Numbers:

- More 27,000 Residents Have Participated in Virtual Town Halls on Unemployment Assistance
- 100,000 + Subscribe in 24 hours to new text notification system (Text COVIDMA to 888-111)
- Testing reports increased by more than 6,000 from yesterday
- Mass 2-1-1 has answered 17,454 calls from residents since activation

Background On The Command Center:

On March 10, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker declared a State of Emergency to support the Commonwealth's response to coronavirus.

On March 14, the Baker-Polito Administration announced the creation of a new COVID-19 Response Command Center. Secretary Marylou Sudders is leading the cross-secretariat response to the outbreak. The Command Center is the Commonwealth's single point of strategic decision making and coordination for the Administration's comprehensive COVID-19 response.

In support of the Command Center, the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) in Framingham has activated to Level 2 (Partial Activation). In addition, MEMA's Regional EOCs in Tewksbury, New Bedford, and Agawam have also been partially activated to support local communities.

Situation in Numbers

Massachusetts current as of 3/25

1,883 Total Cases (click for more information)

15 Deaths (click to read today's news release)

19,794 patients tested to date by MA State Public Health Laboratory, hospitals and commercial laboratories. (+6,045 since 3/24)

United States current as of 3/25

Case numbers are updated regularly at noon Mondays through Fridays.

Total Cases Reported to CDC*:

**CDC updates national numbers Mon.-Fri. by 4pm. Includes Confirmed & Presumptive Positive*

54,453 Total Cases
584 Travel-Related
986 Close Contact
52,883 Under Investigation

737 Deaths

54 Jurisdictions Reporting Cases
(50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and US V.I.)

Social Distancing Basics:

If you go out:

- ✓ Avoid crowds
- ✓ Stay 6 feet away from others
- ✓ Don't shake hands or hug
- ✓ Call/Facetime/online chat with friends and loved ones.

State Actions Today

At a 3:30 pm press conference, Governor Baker and Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Jeffrey Riley provided several updates and announcements: (News Release)

Closure of Schools and Non-Emergency Child Care Programs Extended Until May 4:
Governor Charlie Baker issued an emergency order extending the closure of all public and private schools, and all non-emergency childcare programs, **until May 4** to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 in the Commonwealth.

- This order expands on previous orders issued on **March 15** and **March 18**
- The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) has established a process to approve **Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs** to serve vulnerable children and families of first responders and essential workers. More than 400 providers have been approved to date.
- The order issued today does not apply to residential special education schools.
  Read the Orders here: K-12 School Order | Early Education School Order

Remote Learning and Education: The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is requesting that educators continue to develop and assemble high-quality educational materials to provide students with effective remote learning resources through the month of April. The Department is also creating a model for districts to use and modify in collaboration with local stakeholders to fit their school district's needs and will continue to work with schools to identify best practices for implementing effective remote learning.

Remote learning encompasses a wide variety of learning methods. This could include exploring nature, activities to support students' local communities (with appropriate social distancing) and engaging in hands-on projects and artistic creations that stem from students' experiences.

Additionally, through a new partnership between DESE and WGBH, educational resources will be posted on the department's website, and middle and high school students can access WGBH and WGBY educational programming on WGBH and WGBY on the WORLD channel from **noon to 5 p.m.**

Housing Stability for Vulnerable Populations: The Baker-Polito Administration announced steps to keep vulnerable families in their homes, preserve the health and safety of low-income renters and homeowners, and prevent homelessness due to reduced or lost income. These steps include the following:

- DHCD is moving to temporarily suspend terminations of federal and state rental vouchers under their purview.
- MassHousing is transferring $5 million to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for a COVID-19 Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) fund to assist families facing rent insecurity.
- The Division of Banks (DOB) has issued new guidance to Massachusetts financial institutions and lenders urging them to provide relief for borrowers and will advocate for a 60-day stay on behalf of all homeowners facing imminent foreclosure on their homes.
- DHCD is issuing guidance recommending that all owners of state aided low-income housing, including Local Housing Authorities and private owners, suspend both pending non-essential evictions and the filing of any new non-essential evictions.
- Affordable housing operators are urged to suspend non-essential evictions for loss of income or employment circumstances resulting in a tenant's inability to make rent.

- This guidance urges operators to establish reasonable payment plans, notify Section 8 or public housing residents about interim income recertification to adjust rent payments, and to consider offering relief funding for residents ineligible for income reassessment.

Read the DHCD Guidance Here:

Guidance to owners of state aided low-income housing
Guidance to affordable housing operators

Notices and guidance regarding federal and state rental assistance programs:

- Guidance for Administering MRVP
- Guidance for Administering ARVP
- Initial policies and procedures for federal rental assistance administered by DHCD
- **Read the DOB Guidance Here.**

Expert Advisory Board Established (News Release)
Today, the Baker-Polito Administration announced the COVID-19 Advisory Board, a group of medical experts that will support the Response Command Center during the COVID-19 response.

The Response Command Center, under the leadership of Secretary Marylou Sudders and reporting to Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito, is the Commonwealth's single point of strategic decision making and coordination for the Administration's comprehensive COVID-19 response.
Members of the Advisory Board:

- Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH Mass. DPH
- Dr. Larry Madoff, MD, Mass. DPH
- Scott Gottlieb, MD, American Enterprise Institute
- Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH, Mass. General Hospital
- Paul Biddinger, MD, Mass. General Hospital
- Michael Wagner, MD, FACP, Wellforce
- Eric Lander, PhD, Broad Institute

DPH Order to Pharmacies and Grocery Stores:
Today, DPH issued a new order to support pharmacies and grocery stores and their employees during the COVID-19 public health emergency. This order will require grocery stores and pharmacies to:

- Provide at least one hour per day of shopping for adults over 60-years-old.
- Offer sanitation options, such as hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes, as available, to clean shopping carts and points of frequent contact.
- Appropriate social distancing policies, including a marked "Social Distancing Line," beginning six feet away from all checkout counters.
- Close any self-serve food stations.
- Instruct store employees who are ill to stay home, and for stores to accommodate employees who fall in the high-risk category with alternative assignments to limit exposure.
  Read the Order Here.

MassHealth Launches PCA Help Hotline:
MassHealth announced today that it has established a dedicated hotline through MassOptions to connect MassHealth PCA Consumers to services in the event their PCA is unavailable. Consumers can call **1-844-422-6277** and will be connected to home health services in their region. MassHealth has also updated its policies to temporarily suspend the PCA overtime cap and provide flexibility around home health aide training & certification requirements to streamline the hiring process and allow family members to be considered for hire.

- There are currently over 36,000 MassHealth members receiving personal care attendant (PCA) services
- PCA services are essential services that support individuals with activities of daily living (ADLs), such as dressing, grooming, bathing, ambulating

Additional State Agency Updates Today:

Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
The Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development has produced FAQs around essential/non-essential businesses which will be updated regularly. (Read The FAQ)

Department of Environmental Protection
The Baker-Polito Administration issued an order regarding solid waste/recycling that provides relief from state and federal requirements that govern the hours of service allowed for commercial vehicle operators involved in waste and recycling transportation and collection. The DEP Website announcement can be accessed here.
In addition, the MassDPH website has guidance from MassDEP for solid waste management.

MBTA:
Effective today, the MBTA modified the Commuter Rail's Reduced Service Schedule to allow for 5 trains to arrive in Boston prior to 7 AM. These schedule revisions are being made to address demand for travel by medical professionals and other emergency responders. The specific intent of these changes is to allow essential workers to travel with enough time to meet shift changes at hospitals and other medical facilities.

Line	Departs/Location	Arrives/Destination
Haverhill	5:50 AM from Reading	6:23 AM at North Station
Lowell	5:35 AM from Lowell	6:23 AM at North Station
Fitchburg	4:50 AM from Wachusett	6:30 AM at North Station
Newburyport/Rockport	5:35 AM from Newburyport	6:41 AM at North Station
	*6:03 AM from Beverly for Rockport customers	
Needham	5:45 AM from Needham Heights	6:24 AM at South Station

Other Important Information

American Red Cross Facing Severe Blood Shortage
The COVID-19 virus has caused the cancellation of blood drives across the Commonwealth. There is an urgent need ***now*** for patients with chronic conditions and trauma, as well as ensuring an adequate blood and blood product supply ***going forward***. The Governor has deemed "Blood and plasma donors and the employees of the

organizations that operate and manage related activities" as an essential service. Support is needed to communicate to your residents that the need is urgent, and donating is a necessity to supply the hospitals with the blood our neighbors require. Donating blood is safe and people should not hesitate to give. In addition, there is a need for community blood drive sites in the eastern part of the state. Identifying donation sites is vital to meet the demand as we go forward. Local knowledge, suggestions of sites, and potential partners are crucial to meeting the needs of our neighbors who need blood and blood products.

To schedule a new blood drive contact Bill Forsyth at (617) 699-3808 or at email William.Forsyth@redcross.org.

Those who are healthy, feeling well and eligible to give blood or platelets, are urged to make an appointment to donate as soon as possible by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting RedCrossBlood.org or calling 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767).

Stay Informed

- Get information from trusted sources. Visit https://www.mass.gov/covid19 for the latest news, case counts, and lab testing results.
- Call 2-1-1 with questions
- Text COVIDMA to 888-111 to receive notifications to your phone
- Take care of your emotional health and help others do the same. If you need emotional support during these stressful times:
    - Call 2-1-1 and choose the "CALL2TALK" option.
    - Samaritans is continuing operations 24/7, as always. During this unprecedented time, it can feel overwhelming to receive constant messages about COVID-19. Call or text their 24/7 helpline any time at 877-870-4673.
    - The Disaster Distress Helpline, 1-800-985-5990, is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster, including disease outbreaks like COVID-19. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available to all residents in the United States and its territories.

Communications Resources:

- New DPH Flyer/Infographic on reducing stress & coping with fear of COVID-19
- New DMH on maintaining Emotional Health & Well-Being
- New Social Distancing (youth and general) infographic released on website.
- Social Distancing messages are now on billboards and will soon be available on public transit. They are also now translated into multiple languages.
- There is a new video on Social Distancing specifically targeted specifically at youth.

COVID-2019 infographic for posting in all public places: https://www.mass.gov/doc/stop-the-spread-of-germs-respiratory-diseases-like-flu-and-covid-19/download

A short video for social media, waiting rooms, and other locations: https://youtu.be/HhUpkGxyjS4
Social media – follow and retweet DPH on Twitter @MassDPH, updated several times per day.