

# Wednesday, March 18, 2020

## COVID-19 Response Command Center

### Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

## Situation Update

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. Representatives from the following agencies and organizations were present in the SEOC today: American Red Cross, Dept. of Environmental Protection, Dept. of Fire Services, FEMA, InfraGard, MA Dept. of Public Health, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, MA National Guard, MA Office on Disability, MA State Police, MassDOT/MBTA, and Salvation Army.

Important protective measures to be aware of:

- [Gatherings of over 25 people are prohibited](#) until April 6<sup>th</sup>.
- On-premises consumption of food and drink at bars and restaurants is prohibited until April 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Elementary and Secondary Schools are closed until April 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Colleges and universities, both public and private, are urged to reduce the need for students to be on campus.
- Employers are encouraged to support alternative work arrangements, including allowing employees to work from home.
- Some government offices are closed, you should check the website or call ahead, to confirm hours of operation.
- MBTA trains and buses are running a [reduced service schedule](#).
- Public & Private daycare providers will be closed effective March 23, and Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs will be established to provide priority access for families of emergency personnel, medical staff, and others critical to confronting COVID-19.
- Professional Licenses for individuals in good standing will be extended for 90-days after the end of the public health emergency.



## Situation in Numbers

**Massachusetts** *current as of 3/18*  
256 Total Cases

1,743 patients tested to date by MA State Public Health Laboratory

528 additional tests performed by commercial laboratories

**United States** *current as of 3/18*

Total Cases Reported to CDC\*:

*\* Includes Confirmed & Presumptive Positive*

4,226 Total Cases (+2812)  
269 Travel-Related (+40)  
276 Close Contact (+31)  
6,493 Under Investigation (+2741)  
97 Deaths (+22)

54 Jurisdictions Reporting Cases (49 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 pm [news conference today](#), Governor Baker, Secretary Sudders and Commissioner of Public Health, Dr. Monica Bharel, announced several new steps related to the Commonwealth's response to COVID-19, including the following:

### Enhancing the Healthcare System's Capacity to Respond:

- DPH Commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel has signed two public health orders that have been issued today:
  1. The first Order relaxes administrative requirements so that physicians assistant, or PAs, who previously worked on elective surgeries can now work on other health care demands, including Covid-19.
  2. The second Order, due to the expected demands on nursing staff, allows pharmacists to administer certain medication for the treatment of opioid use disorder, instead of requiring a nurse to do it.

### Cash Flow Relief for Small Local Business:

- Today, the Governor announced new measures for administrative tax relief for small local businesses impacted by COVID-19, especially in the restaurant and hospitality sectors.
- For small businesses, defined as those who paid less than \$150,000 in 2019 in sales and meals, or room occupancy taxes, we will be postponing the payment of their respective sales, meals, or room occupancy taxes.
  1. Taxes due for March, April, and May will instead be due on June 20.
  2. All penalties and interest that would otherwise apply will be waived.
  3. The Department of Revenue is currently drafting emergency regulations to put this relief in place, and we expect them to be finalized before Friday.

### New Law to Accelerate Unemployment Insurance:

- Today, the Governor signed emergency legislation to allow new claims to be paid more quickly by waiving the one week waiting period for unemployment benefits.
- This important change will ensure we can get much-needed unemployment assistance to workers impacted by COVID-19.
- The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development is deploying additional employees to work on processing the large volume of claims.  
The Governor also announced a new COVID-19 workforce web page that includes the latest guidance for employee qualifications and additional. [www.mass.gov/unemployment/covid-19](http://www.mass.gov/unemployment/covid-19)
- Yesterday, the Governor formally requested that the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) issue a "declaration of economic injury" for the Commonwealth.
- This declaration would make it possible for low-interest loans to be made available through the SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program to business owners affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

### Child Care Operations:

- [Effective March 23rd](#), all early education centers and family childcare providers will be closed
- As a result, emergency procedures have been issued to set forth a process for opening Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs.
- The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) also issued emergency procedures to set forth a process for opening Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs during the COVID-19 outbreak to provide

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priority access for families of emergency personnel, medical staff, and others critical to confronting COVID-19.

- Families who work to maintain the health, safety, and welfare of all Commonwealth citizens will receive priority access to emergency childcare programs. Vulnerable children will also receive priority access.
- These emergency childcare programs will be the only ones allowed to operate during this state of emergency and EEC is working to ensure there is sufficient access to emergency child care programs in every region.
- Providers impacted by these closures will continue to receive childcare subsidy payments from the state in order to ensure that programs will be able to re-open once the crisis is over.

Extension of Professional Licenses:

- Governor Baker signed a new emergency order today to ensure that licensed professionals do not have their licenses or registrations lapse due to unforeseen problems with renewal during the COVID-19 emergency. Specifically, under this order, occupational or professional licenses of individuals that are in good standing and that would otherwise be up for renewal during the COVID-19 emergency shall be extended for 90 days after the end of the public health emergency. This order does not affect license extensions that have already been granted in earlier emergency orders.

Managing Stress in Uncertain Times:

- Secretary Sudders spoke about actions residents can help take care of themselves and each other as we live through these stressful times.
  - Take a break from constant news monitoring about COVID-19
  - Take care of your body, eat healthy, get some physical activity, and enough sleep. Deep breathing, stretching and meditating helps. Take time to unwind and do activities that you enjoy. Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you're feeling.
- She highlighted [CALL2Talk a resource for emotional support and suicide prevention](#) which can be accessed through 2-1-1.

The Importance of Social Distancing:

- Commissioner Bharel emphasized the importance of social distancing as a strategy to blunt the spread and severity of COVID-19 in the community.

The Department of Public Health release new educational resources, including:

- A new [Social Distancing Infographic](#)
- An [explainer video](#)

## *Stay Informed*

Key Public Health Messages for All Residents:

- Protect yourself by following public health advice about keeping your hands clean, and covering coughs and sneezes.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Protect others who are most at risk of COVID-19 by keeping your distance from people (at least 6 feet away from others), especially those who are older, and people living with chronic health conditions.
- If you are outside, avoid crowds.
- Don't shake hands or hug.
- Stay connected to friends and loved ones by phone or through other technology.

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- Get information from trusted sources. Visit <https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus> for the latest news, case counts, and lab testing results.
- 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

Other Resources:

**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.

**Massachusetts 2-1-1** - Massachusetts residents are urged to use 2-1-1 for information, resources, and referrals regarding COVID-19. Operators are staffing this hotline 24/7 and translators are available in multiple languages. Residents with questions can dial 2-1-1 from any landline or cellphone, or use the live chat option on the [Mass 2-1-1 website](#). As of 9:00 AM today, Mass 2-1-1 has answered more than **6,100** coronavirus-related calls since last Thursday, March 12. There are 17 staff now answering calls, including staff from United Way and 7 staff members from DPH.