Friday, March 27, 2020

COVID-19 Response Command Center

Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

Situation Update

State Actions in Today's Report:

- State Income Tax Filing Deadline Extended to July 15
- New Guidelines on Travel and Transportation
- New Health Care Resources to Support COVID-19 Response
- New List of Appointment-only Testing Sites Available
- Temporary Changes to the RIDE Paratransit Service
- Continuing Need for Red Cross Blood Donations

Helpful Links:

- Mass.Gov/covid19
- Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency
- Unemployment & COVID-19
- Dept. Of Transitional Assistance Online Portal
- Emergency Childcare Site
- MBTA.com/covid19
- Complete List of Emergency Orders & Guidance

New Resource Highlight:

Buoy Health Care Tool:
The Baker-Polito Administration announced the launch of Buoy Health's new online resource for residents to check their symptoms and connect with the next appropriate health care resource. This tool does not replace emergency medical care, but it may be used as a support for residents during the COVID-19 outbreak to connect them with appropriate health care resources if they display coronavirus symptoms. Buoy Health's online 24/7 tool is free for Massachusetts residents and uses current COVID-19 guidance from the CDC and DPH.

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 3/27

3,240 Total Cases (click for more information)

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

29,371 patients tested to date by MA State Public Health Laboratory, hospitals and commercial laboratories. (+5,750 since 3/26)

United States current as of 3/27

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*

85,536 Total Cases
712 Travel-Related
1,326 Close Contact
83,318 Under Investigation

1,246 Deaths

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

Social Distancing Basics:

- ✓ Call/Facetime/online chat with friends and loved ones.

If you go out:

- ✓ Avoid crowds
- ✓ Stay 6 feet away from others
- ✓ Don't shake hands or hug

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State Actions Today

At an 11 a.m. press conference, Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito, and Secretary Sudders provided several updates and announcements: (**Video of Today's Briefing**)

State Income Tax Filing Deadline Being Extended to July 15 (News Release)
Governor Charlie Baker, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito, Senate President Karen Spilka and House Speaker Robert DeLeo today announced an agreement to extend the 2019 state individual income tax filing and payment deadline from April 15 to July 15 due to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. This income tax relief is automatic and taxpayers do not need to file any additional forms to qualify.

Today's announcement will move the state income tax filing deadline to match the July 15 deadline for filing federal individual income taxes. Legislation will be filed in the near future to finance the extension, and accompanying administrative changes will be implemented through the Department of Revenue. Specifically, the legislation will authorize the Commonwealth borrowing flexibility to manage deferred revenue this fiscal year and repay it in the next fiscal year, which starts July 1, 2020.

Individuals with questions or concerns regarding taxes can contact the Massachusetts Department of Revenue at (617) 887-6367 or send a secure e-message through MassTaxConnect.

New Guidelines on Travel and Transportation (News Release)
Today, the Baker-Polito Administration announced new COVID-19 public health emergency responses issuing new guidelines on travel and transportation.

Beginning March 27, all travelers arriving to Massachusetts are instructed to self-quarantine for 14 days. This guidance will be displayed as posters at service plazas along 1-90 eastbound, distributed as flyers at major transportation hubs and on posted on highway message boards. Visitors are instructed not to travel to Massachusetts if they are displaying symptoms. **Health care workers, public health workers, public safety workers, transportation workers and designated essential workers are exempt from this requirement.**

New Health Care Resources to Support COVID-19 Response
Today, the Baker-Polito Administration announced new COVID-19 public health emergency responses offering further support for health care professionals and patients.

***Medical School Graduation*:** Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders and DPH Commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel have coordinated with Massachusetts medical schools to facilitate early graduation of their qualified fourth-year students to allow graduates to support the health care workforce during the COVID-19 response. This coordinated effort includes Boston University School of Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Tufts University School of Medicine and Harvard Medical School.

***Emergency Limited Medical Licenses*:** The Board of Registration in Medicine will provide medical school graduates who have matched as an intern, resident or fellow with a Board-approved Massachusetts health care facility or training program with Emergency 90-Day Limited Licenses to practice medicine to ensure that our health care workforce is prepared during the COVID-19 public health emergency. To qualify, medical residents must fill out an application to be approved by the program or facility, and once approved, residents will receive the emergency license and be able to start when their program begins. This Emergency Limited License will

allow medical staff to provide support while the regular screening progresses, and it is not a substitute for the regular Limited License process.

***Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs)*:** The administration has issued a public health order to provide APRNs in good standing with greater flexibility in their prescribing practices. This order includes the following updates:

- Certified nurse midwives will be allowed to continue to prescribe as already authorized.
- Authorizes APRNs who have at least two years of supervised practice experience to prescribe without physician supervision.
- Authorizes APRNs with fewer than two years of supervised practice experience to prescribe with physician supervision, but without the normally required written guidelines.

Read the order here.

***Health Care Professional Volunteers*:** To support ongoing COVID-19 emergency response efforts, the Baker-Polito Administration has partnered with the Massachusetts Medical Society to match volunteers with our communities and health care providers based on skillsets and need. There is an immediate need for respiratory therapists and public health nurses, and the administration is asking health care professionals interested in volunteering to sign up at **MAResponds.org**.

***MassHealth Waiver*:** The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has approved, in part, the Baker-Polito Administration's 1135 waiver to fast-track MassHealth enrollment, streamline administrative requirements for providers and better deliver critically needed health care services during the COVID-19 public health emergency. CMS has approved the following items of the waiver:

- Enrollment of out-of-state providers and easing other provider requirements when enrolling in MassHealth.
- Allowing providers to be reimbursed for care in alternative, unlicensed settings.
- Suspension of prior authorization requirements and extending pre-existing prior authorizations through the emergency.

Additional State Agency Updates Today:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

DPH has posted a new list of COVID-19 testing sites for individuals who have a clinician's referral. If someone thinks they have symptoms of COVID-19, they should first call their health care provider. If that clinician thinks a test is appropriate but are unable to offer one at their own health care facility, they can provide a referral that the individual can use to schedule a test at a site nearest to them. **A referral and appointment are necessary**. (**Find The List Here**)

Massachusetts Department of Transportation

In an effort to support the new guidelines on travel and transportation announced today by the Baker-Polito Administration, MassDOT is utilizing its video messaging boards to alert out-of-state travelers coming into Massachusetts from other states to self-quarantine for 14 days immediately upon arrival.

MBTA

The MBTA has announced temporary updates to the T's paratransit service, The RIDE, in a continuing effort to prioritize safety, protect the health and safety of the T's customers and workforce, and to preserve the

continuity of transit services for those who must travel for purposes that are absolutely necessary. These temporary changes were made in consultation with The Riders' Transportation Access Group, the Boston Center for Independent Living, and the Massachusetts Senior Action Council, and include the elimination of shared RIDE trips, temporarily extending RIDE eligibility and postponing eligibility appointments, adjustments to booking windows, updates to subscriptions, and a reduction in transfer trips.

Details on these changes are available at www.mbta.com/coronavirus and www.mbta.com/TheRide.

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 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 the keyword **COVIDMA to 888-777** 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.

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Communications Resources:

- New DPH Flyer/Infographic on reducing stress & coping with fear of COVID-19
- New DMH resources on maintaining Emotional Health & Well-Being
- New Social Distancing (youth and general) infographic released on website.
- MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) visual tool for communicating with hard of hearing and Deaf individuals.

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

Social media – follow and retweet DPH on Twitter @MassDPH, updated several times per day.