

MASSACHUSETTS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY SITUATIONAL AWARENESS STATEMENT #4

Date: March 16, 2020

Time: 5:30 PM

Re: Informational Update: Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Situation

In response to the threat that COVID-19 poses to the Commonwealth, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) formed an Interagency Planning Working Group comprised of health, human services, public safety and several other government agencies to develop continuity plans for COVID-19. This follows the Department of Public Health's infectious disease task force that was stood up in January. This working group is broken down into three subgroups that include:

- Emergency Services Subgroup
- Logistics Subgroup
- Mass Care Subgroup

These groups meet daily and have been assigned the task of developing strategies and coordinating support efforts related to COVID-19. A summary of each subgroup's current planning activities is included in this report.

In an effort to support COVID-19 planning activities and coordinate statewide response the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) in Framingham remains activated at Level 2 (Partial Activation). In addition, MEMA's Regional EOCs are also partially activated to support local communities. At this time, the SEOC and REOCs are operational Monday – Friday, 8AM – 4PM; operational shifts are subject to change as the situation continues to develop.

Representatives from the following agencies are present in the SEOC:

- MEMA
- American Red Cross
- Dept. of Environmental Protection
- Dept. of Fire Services
- Exec. Office of Elder Affairs
- FEMA
- InfraGard
- MA Dept. of Public Health
- MA National Guard
- MA Office on Disability
- MA State Police
- MassDOT
- Massport
- Salvation Army

COVID- 19 Cases in Massachusetts:

Confirmed COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts as of **March 16, 2020** (numbers updated daily by 4:00 PM): **197**

- Going forward, all "presumptive positive" cases will be treated as "confirmed positive".

Massachusetts residents subject to COVID-19 quarantine as of **March 10, 2020** (this information is updated every Wednesday by 12:00 PM): **1,083**

- Total of individuals who have completed monitoring (no longer in quarantine): 638
- Total of individuals currently undergoing monitoring/ under quarantine: 445

For more information on case counts and ongoing testing efforts, visit <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-cases-quarantine-and-monitoring>

State Actions:

The Baker-Polito Administration continues to take steps to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Massachusetts. A comprehensive list of emergency orders and guidance is available [here](#).

School Closures:

The SEOC is aware, via reports from local officials and the media, of approximately 178 school districts with at least one school closure as of today (3/16). Governor Baker has ordered a 3-week suspension of school operations for educational purposes at all public and private elementary and secondary (K-12) schools in the Commonwealth (not including residential and day schools for special needs students), beginning Tuesday, March 17 and continuing until Monday, April 6. The suspension of educational programming would not necessarily affect the availability of school buildings for the provision of food or other essential non-educational services. [Full text of the order](#).

Gatherings and Restaurants:

Governor Baker has issued an emergency order limiting gatherings to 25 individuals and prohibiting on-premises consumption of food or drink at bars and restaurants, beginning Tuesday, March 17 and effective until Monday, April 6. [Full text of the order](#).

State Office Closures:

Governor Baker directed that all non-emergency Executive Branch employees should not report to their workplace today or Tuesday, March 17th. During this period, the administration will work to expand alternative work arrangements for the executive branch workforce and further develop plans to continue to provide essential state government services.

Trial Court Closures:

Court leaders have closed the Trial Courts to for today and tomorrow, Tuesday, March 17th. Additional information is available [here](#).

Health Care:

MDPH has issued the following guidance:

- All commercial insurers, self-insured plans, and the Group Insurance Commission are required to cover medically necessary telehealth services related to COVID-19 testing and treatment. Insurers must do this without requiring cost-sharing of any kind – such as co-pays and coinsurance – for testing and treatment. [Full text of the order](#).
- All assisted living residences are to restrict visitors to protect the health of residents and staff. [Full text of the order](#).
- All hospitals are to restrict visitors. [Full text of the order](#).
- Hospitals must cancel non-essential elective procedures. [Full text of the order](#).
- Licensed pharmacies may compound and sell hand sanitizer over the counter. [Full text of the order](#).
- The Board of Registration in Nursing has updated its policies to expedite the processing of reciprocal license applications for nurses licensed in another jurisdiction to allow those applications to be processed in one business day. [Full text of the policy](#).

Utility Shutoff Moratorium:

The Department of Public Utilities has implemented a moratorium on gas/electric utility shutoffs until further notice. More information is available [here](#).

Registry of Motor Vehicles:

The Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) will extend the renewal timeline of certain credentials to reduce the need for customers to physically visit an RMV service center for in-person transactions. [Full text of the order.](#)

Unemployment Assistance:

The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) and the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA), in coordination with the US Department of Labor (USDOL), are taking a series of actions to assist workers and employers.

For current unemployment claims:

- All requirements regarding attending seminars at the MassHire career centers have been suspended.
- Missing deadlines due to effects of COVID-19 will be excused under DUA's good cause provision.
- All appeal hearings will be held by telephone only.

The DOL issued guidance to the states instructing state agencies to apply existing law flexibly. Under the DOL guidance, DUA may now pay unemployment benefits if a worker is quarantined due to an order by a civil authority or medical professional or leaves employment due to reasonable risk of exposure or infection or to care for a family member and does not intend to or is not allowed to return to work. The worker need not provide medical documentation and need only be available for work when and as able.

To assist individuals who cannot work due to the impact of COVID-19, the administration is filing emergency legislation that will allow new claims to be paid more quickly by waiving the one week waiting period for unemployment benefits.

EOLWD and DUA are also filing emergency regulations that will allow people impacted by COVID-19 to collect unemployment if their workplace is shut down and expects to reopen in four or fewer weeks. The following conditions apply:

- Workers must remain in contact with their employer during the shutdown.
- Workers must be available for any work their employer may have for them that they are able to do.
- An employer may request to extend the period of the covered shut-down to eight weeks, and workers will remain eligible for the longer period under the same conditions described above.
- If necessary, DUA may extend these time periods for workers and employers.

Employers who are impacted by COVID-19 may request up to a 60-day grace period to file quarterly reports and pay contributions.

Pending federal legislation proposes further relief including additional money for unemployment benefits, and relief to employers for charges related to unemployment benefits paid due to COVID-19.

Municipal Governance:

Governor Baker proposed a package of legislation to help address challenges to municipal governance resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, including potential delays in holding Town Meetings and adopting Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) municipal budgets. Provisions include:

- Amend existing statute authorizing Moderators to postpone Town Meetings by thirty days. State statute currently permits postponement for "public safety emergency," and the legislation would add "public health emergency" as a second reason for postponement.
- Permit local Select Boards to postpone Town Meetings beyond the statutory June 30 deadline when the Governor has declared a state of emergency and conditions prevent the completion of a Town Meeting.

- Permit local Select Boards to temporarily adopt lower quorum rules. This would be an opt-in provision to allow a town-by-town determination, and it would enable Select Boards to designate the quorum level. Numerous towns have existing low quorum provisions in their by-laws.
- Permit continued month-to-month spending into FY21 by towns based on the prior fiscal year budget with approval of the Division of Local Services during states of emergency. The month-to-month authorization would continue so long as a state of emergency prevents the adoption of a budget. Cities have similar authority under existing state law.
- Permit towns to access their free cash balance for FY21 spending with approval of the Division of Local Services. This would be based on the July 2019 certified balance and could continue until an FY21 budget is adopted.
- Permit municipal spending from revolving funds at the level set by their Fiscal Year 2020 appropriation until an FY21 budget is adopted.
- Authorize a three-year amortization period for deficit spending incurred as a result of COVID-19 crisis. The default rule would require an FY21 tax rate to provide for one-year amortization and this change would follow the 2015 precedent for snow removal costs.

"No Sail" Order for Cruise Ship Operations:

The CDC has issued a 30 day 'No Sail' order for any cruise ship which has not voluntarily suspended operations. The Coast Guard will assist the CDC in preventing cruise ships from embarking passengers in US ports. The Port of Boston does not currently have any cruise ship arrivals scheduled until April 17th, though will identify any cruise ships or vessels carrying 250 or more persons (passengers and crew) with an overnight itinerary, planning to embark passengers.

MBTA Reduced Schedule:

Starting Tuesday, March 17, trains and buses will run with reduced service to slow the spread of COVID-19. In addition, the MBTA has increased cleaning and sanitation at stations and on vehicles. Additional information is available at <https://www.mbta.com/covid19>

Interagency Planning Subgroup Updates:

Emergency Services Subgroup

- The Emergency Services Branch comprised of OCME, Massport, DPH-OEMS, MSP, DFS, MEMA met this morning (with OEMS and OCME dialing in) and facilitated a discussion of the needs of responder agencies. The list of questions was forwarded to DPH for guidance and answers with a primary focus on responder quarantine information. The list of the questions focused on PPE and guidance on the quarantining and wellbeing of responder personnel.
- At 2pm, MEMA & DFS had a conference call with OCME & DPH regarding temporary morgue location and needs. A follow on call will be scheduled to continue this discussion.
- The Emergency Services Branch is aware that MEMA is receiving an increase in requests for PPE (masks and gowns) from local communities. While these requests have been routed through the Board of Health/Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition process, the Emergency Services Branch has requested situational awareness on the total requests.
- The Branch will work on disseminating the DPH guidance information to the response agencies statewide once it is received.

Logistics Subgroup:

The planning group continues to prepare for extensive logistics operations in several areas in response to COVID-19. Specific areas of focus, through today and continuing through tomorrow, include:

- Warehousing Support: To be consistent on process, supply chain, order fulfillment, and intake of gloves, meals, and other supplies.
- Facility Assessment: To conduct assessments of any support facilities, including isolation facilities, warehouses, drive through test sites, and others as identified.

- This afternoon, warehouses are being assessed to potentially support a warehousing and commodity distribution operation early this week. The sites will be established so when supply chains come online goods can be received as they are delivered.
- MEMA is still awaiting delivery of goods, including gloves, hand sanitizer, and other commodities as needed and directed. Once received, resource requests can be fulfilled.
- Donations Management: To provide a consistent means by which unsolicited donations can be received and catalogued.
- Drive Through Testing: Focused planning on feasibility, size, location, and support services needed to operate drive through testing sites, while ensuring that federal efforts are not being duplicated.
- SEOC Support: To ensure the SEOC remains functional, with all support services present.

Mass Care Subgroup:

The Mass Care Group met and coordinated on the following tasks today:

- In-home quarantine wrap-around services
- Continuity of food delivery services such as:
 - Meals on Wheels,
 - hotel/motel quarantine and
 - isolation process
 - identifying and establishing quarantine centers.
- The Group participated in a conference call with homeless shelter providers and DHCD to answer questions and determine their needs for support.
- The Group also discussed an inquiry regarding support for feeding school children.

Disaster/Emergency Recovery Actions:

- MEMA and the Baker-Polito Administration are working closely with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to activate the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program which would provide assistance to eligible businesses and non-profits impacted by COVID-19.
 - The [MEMA Small Business website](#) and SBA survey form went live on Thursday yesterday. Over 700 survey responses were received via the website through this morning.
 - The website was modified to provide information and stopped accepting additional surveys as enough data had been gathered.
- Guidance on cost tracking requirements under the Stafford Act has been sent to local officials.
- Recovery is in the process of planning virtual Applicant Briefings to begin the FEMA Public Assistance (PA) process.
- FEMA will host a call tomorrow with Region 1 states to give additional guidance regarding the PA process.

Local Actions:

MEMA Regional offices have been in regular contact throughout the day with local officials. Numerous cities and towns across the Commonwealth are taking steps to limit potential exposure of residents to coronavirus, including postponing/cancelling public events and closing schools, town/city offices, and other public buildings.

Communities on the Cape and Islands report an increase in seasonal residents returning early.

Local officials also report experiencing ongoing difficulties procuring supplies of PPE, hand sanitizer, and other cleaning supplies due to supply chain issues.

Local EOC Activations / States of Emergency:

EOC Activations:

- Adams
- Barnstable County MACC
- Belmont
- Bernardston
- Cohasset
- Gloucester
- Longmeadow
- Mendon
- Nantucket
- North Adams
- Norwell
- Plainville
- Plymouth
- Springfield
- UMASS Lowell
- Waltham
- Weymouth
- Worcester

States of Emergency:

- Acushnet
- Adams
- Bernardston
- Billerica
- Brockton
- Chatham
- Cheshire
- Chesterfield
- Clarksburg
- Cohasset
- Cummington
- Deerfield
- Easthampton
- Erving
- Goshen
- Greenfield
- Groton
- Holyoke
- Leyden
- Littleton
- Mendon
- Montague
- New Bedford
- New Salem
- North Adams
- Norwood
- Pittsfield

- Plymouth
- Plympton
- Rutland
- Sharon
- Southampton
- Springfield
- Tolland
- Walpole
- Wendell
- Westfield
- Westford
- Weymouth
- Winchendon
- Worcester

Stay Informed

In an effort to ensure you have good situational awareness and early guidance from DPH, all stakeholders and the general public are encouraged to visit the DPH website as updates and guidance changes frequently. The link for DPH website can be found here: www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus.

Additionally, Massachusetts residents can call Mass 2-1-1 to learn more about:

- COVID-19 prevention, symptoms, and treatment
- Information about testing
- Guidance for people planning or returning from travel

Massachusetts 2-1-1 is open to callers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Operators fluent in Spanish are available, and more than 150 other languages are supported through an interpreter services line. 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 this morning, Mass 2-1-1 has answered a total of 3,060 corona virus-related calls since last Friday.

Planning Guidance

Below are hyperlinks from DPH's website that provide specific guidance and recommendations for: (1) emergency responders and law enforcement, (2) businesses and employers, (3) elementary and secondary schools, and (4) colleges and universities. To access the hyperlinks hold "Ctrl" and click the link.

- Guidance for [emergency responders and law enforcement click here](#).
- Guidance for [businesses and employers click here](#).
- Guidance for [elementary and secondary schools click here](#).
- Guidance for [colleges and universities click here](#)

Regarding continuity planning, employers should consider how best to decrease the spread of acute respiratory illnesses and lower the potential impact of COVID-19 in workplaces in the event of an outbreak by taking steps to:

- Reduce transmission among staff

- Protect people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications
- Maintain business operations
- Minimize adverse effects on other entities in their supply chains

All private and public sector agencies are encouraged to develop or update contingency plans to ensure they can continue to carry out essential functions regardless of the threat or impact. For guidance and more information on continuity planning visit <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/continuity-and-safety-planning-guidance>