



News Release

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Charles D. Baker

Governor

Karyn Polito

Lieutenant Governor

Marylou Sudders

Secretary

Monica Bharel, MD, MPH

Commissioner

Further Information:

Ann Scales

Ann.Scales@state.ma.us

(617) 624-5006

For Immediate Release

State Health Officials Announce Launch of 2-1-1 to Provide COVID-19 Information and Referrals 24/7

Two private national labs approved to conduct testing in Massachusetts; State receives initial shipments of personal protective equipment from Strategic National Stockpile; Guidance issued to elementary and secondary schools

BOSTON (March 13, 2020)– The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced that Massachusetts 2-1-1 will now provide real-time COVID-19 information, resources, and referrals in multiple languages. This expansion is the result of an increased investment in resources directed towards this 24-hour state-supported telephone hotline.

Through this partnership with Massachusetts 2-1-1, DPH subject matter experts are expanding access to information 24/7, and empowering call operators to provide the latest information about the status of COVID-19 response efforts in Massachusetts. At peak call times, DPH staff will augment the call team to ensure residents' questions are answered without delay. This new service is in addition to a dedicated site mass.gov/covid19, which is updated daily with information and resources.

"We are committed to providing the most updated and accurate information about COVID-19 response efforts in Massachusetts," said **Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH**. "Mass 2-1-1 is an invaluable partner in helping us to ensure that every resident of the Commonwealth has access to the information they need to keep themselves and their families healthy and safe."

Beginning today, residents can call 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 that is available 24/7.

Residents with questions should dial 2-1-1 from any landline or cellphone. Callers dialing 2-1-1 will hear an automated menu of options. **Callers press 2-6 for coronavirus.** Residents can also reach 2-1-1 through a live chat option on the [Massachusetts 2-1-1 website](#).

Yesterday, two labs received federal approval to conduct testing for COVID-19 in Massachusetts. Clinicians can send specimens from suspected COVID-19 patients to commercial labs that are now up and running. These tests do not need to be approved by DPH.

DPH also received an initial shipment of personal protective equipment (PPE) yesterday, in response to a formal request to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for needed PPE from the National Strategic Stockpile. The shipment included surgical gowns, gloves, eye protection and masks, which are being distributed to local public health practitioners. A portion of the shipment was expedited to Berkshire Medical Center, which received it yesterday.

Earlier today, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and DPH issued [instructions and guidance to Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) regarding COVID-19, including:

- Effective immediately, all schools must cancel or reschedule large events or gatherings (including assemblies) of 250 people or more for the foreseeable future, and schools are strongly urged to postpone or cancel other events if participants cannot maintain the recommended minimum 6 feet distance – known as “social distancing.”
- All schools must implement policies on expanded environmental cleaning, whether or not there has been a known case of COVID-19 in the school. Schools must clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily using an [EPA-registered disinfectant](#).
- At this time, the administration does not recommend school closures on a statewide basis, but the guidance allows for flexibility within school districts where there has been exposure to COVID-19.

The full guidance can be found online at [Guidance to Elementary and Secondary Schools Regarding COVID-19](#).

On Tuesday, [Governor Charlie Baker declared a State of Emergency](#) to support the Commonwealth’s response to coronavirus. The Administration has updated guidance to the general public, specifically urging older adults and those with health issues to avoid large crowds and events. The Administration also released new policies to protect individuals in [long-term care facilities](#), and those served in [community-based and congregate care settings](#) from respiratory illnesses.

Individuals who live in households with vulnerable people, like elderly parents, should also consider avoiding crowds to mitigate risk. This guidance is posted on the Department of Public Health’s website, [mass.gov/covid19](#).

The public is reminded of steps to take to limit the spread of COVID-19:

- Cover your mouth – when you cough or sneeze use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands
- Wash your hands – with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based sanitizing gel

- Stay home if you are sick – and avoid close contact with others

The Administration will continue to update the public on further developments and individuals are encouraged to consult both the **Department of Public Health** and the US **Centers for Disease Control** and Prevention websites for the most up to date information.

The latest information and guidance regarding COVID-19 is available at **mass.gov/covid19**.

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About Massachusetts 2-1-1

Mass2-1-1 is the 24/7 statewide information and referral line available in 140+ languages that connects callers with critical social service programs and organizations in their local community. It can be reached by dialing 2-1-1 from any landline or cell phone in the state. Mass2-1-1 is a free information and referral service provided through funding from three contracts with the state of Massachusetts to be their official 24-hour call line, as well as funding from 19 local United Ways across the state.