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PUBLIC HEALTH WEEKLY UPDATE:
COVID-19
November 30, 2020

This is an abbreviated update, due to the Thanksgiving holiday last week.

Below is a summary related to the Town of Belmont's response to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. The Town of Belmont is committed to providing information including this weekly update on the COVID-19 situation. Numbers related to COVID-19 and other pertinent information are updated regularly on the Town's website.

The Town of Belmont currently has 391 *cumulative* confirmed cases of COVID-19, which is an increase of 45 cases since our November 20 report. There have been a total of 60 COVID-19 related deaths in the Town of Belmont, 57 of which are confirmed by filed death certificates with the Town Clerk's Office and 3 are *unconfirmed*. Due to the new case count over the past two weeks, this puts Belmont in the **Yellow** zone according to the **new color designation metrics** *(>10 average cases/100k OR >5% Positivity, as reported in the last two weeks*).

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) continues to provide weekly reports of COVID-19 data by city or town as part of its Dashboard for COVID-19 Cases, Quarantine and Monitoring. MDPH updates this list once a week on Thursdays.

COVID-19 Reporting Issues in MAVEN

The Massachusetts Virtual Epidemiologic Network (MAVEN) is the system used statewide to track and follow up with COVID-19 cases and contacts. Due to the scale of the pandemic and the constant influx of information into the system, the town designation of COVID cases is sometimes changed as more is learned about each case. This can be due to employment, if they attend college, or where they are going to isolate. This sometimes leads to discrepancies in the numbers reported weekly by the state, as they might report the numbers either before or after cases are moved to their rightful town. This is why the data that the town of Belmont reports may differ from what the state reports. The Belmont Health Department looks at the most updated data that is available every day, to ensure that we are reporting the most current numbers for the town.

Belmont Town-Level COVID-19 Dashboard

With an increased demand for timely data relating to COVID-19 cases in the town of Belmont, transitioning into a more effective data display format became a goal. This week, the data displayed on the town's COVID-19 page will be shared in its new form. This dashboard provides the same data that has always been found on the town website, it is now more streamlined and more efficient for updating the numbers.

Find the Dashboard at the top of the town COVID-19 Page: https://www.belmont-ma.gov/home/urgent-alerts/covid-19-information-for-the-town-of-belmont-find-all-updates-here

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COVID-19 Testing – Updates and Tips

Should I be tested?
You should get a test for COVID-19 if:
- You develop *any* symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild, or
- You are a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, or
- You have traveled to a non-low risk state and are returning to MA, or
- You are planning to travel to a state that requires testing prior to arrival

Getting Tested as Cases Surge
As cases continue to rise in Massachusetts, here is some updated information if you are seeking COVID-19 testing for yourself or your family.
- Stop the Spread (STS) sites continue to produce efficient test results, typically within 24-72 hours of your test
- But with the higher rates of testing, you may face delays in receiving your test results from any testing location
- Lines at STS locations have increased with the higher need for testing for those who have symptoms, who may have been exposed, or who have or are planning to travel
- Be prepared to wait for one or more hours at the drive through and walk up locations
  - You can alternatively seek an appointment at one of the STS sites that offers them, or from one of the other types of testing sites
- Other testing sites include urgent care locations and pharmacies – the online testing map will identify what type of testing sites you're looking at while searching your area

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?
If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild, please contact your healthcare provider and a test site near you to schedule a test. You can also check your symptoms online.
Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus and may include:
- Fever, chills or shaking chills
- Signs of a lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, lowered oxygen saturation)
- Fatigue, sore throat, headache, body aches/myalgia, or new loss of sense of taste or smell
- Other less common symptoms can include gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g. nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea), rash, and inflammatory conditions such as "COVID toes".
- In elderly, chronically ill, or debilitated individuals such as residents of a long-term care facility, symptoms of COVID-19 may be subtle such as alterations in mental status or in blood glucose control

Where can I get a test?
Please visit the Massachusetts interactive testing map to find a testing site near you.
You can also download a full list of sites: MA COVID-19 Testing Sites PDF | DOC
Information continues to evolve quickly, so we encourage all those looking to be tested to contact the site prior to arrival. Many sites may also require pre-screening, a referral and/or an appointment.
Is there a cost?
COVID-19 testing for symptomatic individuals and close contacts is usually covered by insurance and available at no cost to you. Contact your insurance with questions about if particular testing sites are within your network. Additionally, many test sites in the Commonwealth test uninsured individuals for free. If you are uninsured, please call your local test site to confirm before making an appointment.

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Stop the Spread Testing Sites

The Commonwealth has launched a strategic testing program involving **free** COVID-19 testing sites in communities throughout Massachusetts to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

This "Stop the Spread" initiative is a data-driven effort to reduce the prevalence of COVID-19 in communities that are above the state average in total cases and positive test rate, and have experienced a decline in testing levels since April. The testing sites are located in different cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. Residents of these communities are urged to take advantage of the availability of these new testing sites, even if they are asymptomatic. <u>While these sites are being launched in these communities, they are open to all residents of the Commonwealth, and residents do not need to have symptoms to be tested.</u>

You can find additional information about the "Stop the Spread" initiative test sites here: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/stop-the-spread

*You will also be able to find a **fast fact sheet** on Stop the Spread sites in proximity to Belmont at the top of the town COVID page starting this week.*

COVID-19 Testing Reminders:

There are 2 types of COVID-19 testing: **Diagnostic Testing** and **Antibody Testing**. Diagnostic testing is the type that tells you if you **currently** have COVID-19. These tests are typically done using a nasal swab, oral swab, or saliva sample. There are two types of diagnostic tests:

- **Molecular** tests, such as RT-PCR tests, that detect the virus's genetic material.
- **Antigen** tests that detect specific proteins on the surface of the virus.
  - Often called "rapid diagnostic testing" – Antigen tests are more likely to miss an active coronavirus infection compared to molecular tests, and may also be more likely to return a false positive result in certain testing situations.
  - Antigen tests should always be followed with a PCR test to confirm the results

Antibody (or serology) testing is the type that helps you find out whether you may have been infected with COVID-19 **in the past**. This is a blood test that looks for antibodies, which are proteins in your blood that fight infections. Antibody testing is important to help us understand how many people have been exposed to the virus.

- Important to know: at this time, **most people don't need antibody tests** and they should not be used to guide decisions on whether to stop isolation or return to work. Currently, there is no proof that antibodies in your blood means that you are immune from further infection with COVID-19.

*Under the August 1 travel requirements, the test that is required to forego your 14 day quarantine is PCR Testing. Make sure to inquire about which test you are receiving at the testing site, as the antigen or antibody tests cannot be used as a replacement for molecular/PCR testing. More information on types of testing can be found on the FDA's website here.

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