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PUBLIC HEALTH WEEKLY UPDATE:
COVID-19
April 16, 2021

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 1096 *cumulative* confirmed cases of COVID-19, which is an increase of 16 cases since our April 9 report. There have been a total of 80 COVID-19 related deaths to date for the Town of Belmont, all of which are confirmed by filed death certificates with the Town Clerk's Office. Due to the new case count over the past two weeks, our average daily incidence of 9.9/100k, and our 1.03 percent positivity, Belmont is still **Green** this week according to the color designation metrics *(Less than 10 average cases/100k and greater than 10 new cases overall, 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

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

Belmont Public Schools COVID-19 Dashboard

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 *- Or on the Belmont Public Schools Website as a banner on the home page*

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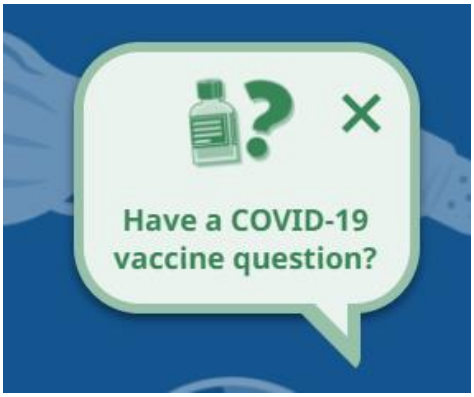

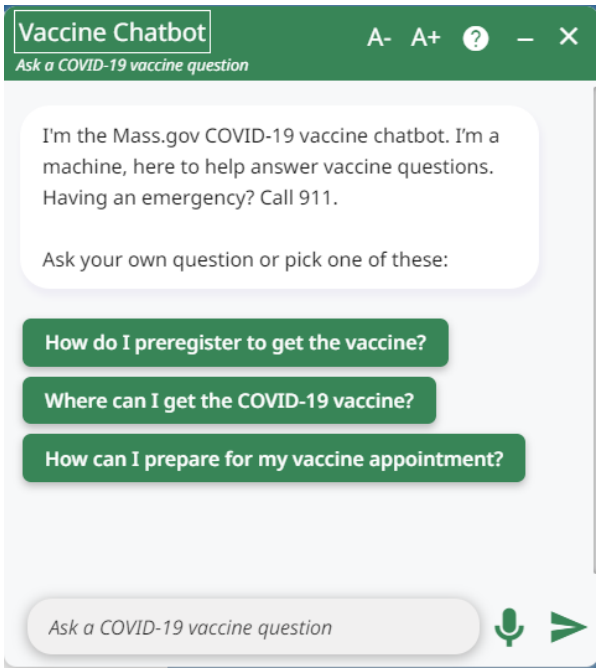

New Interactive Vaccine Chat Feature

This week, Mass.gov added a feature to their website to help residents get information and assistance relating to the COVID vaccine. This is an interactive chat feature, which pops up when you're on a vaccine page, or when you search for vaccine information on Mass.gov. You can ask a variety of questions and the chat feature can direct you to the appropriate places on the website to find the answers. This is another resource to try and provide more information on the vaccine, and make getting an appointment more accessible to Massachusetts residents.

Spring Reminders

As weather gets warmer and more people get vaccinated against COVID-19, it is as important as ever to follow CDC and DPH guidance to keep yourself and your community safe. This involves wearing a mask if you decide to go out, and maintaining 6 feet of distance from anyone you encounter. You should be carrying a mask with you at all times, even when you are out for a walk or a run. The COVID-19 pandemic is unfortunately not yet over, but following these guidance measures will help bring us to the end of the pandemic faster, in conjunction with vaccination efforts.

Mask Reminders

Here are some tips about how to properly wear your face coverings, and what type of face coverings are recommended. As a reminder, face coverings are now required when you are outside of your home in public, as per Governor's COVID-19 Order #55. This is regardless of ability to social distance.

CDC Mask Guidance: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html

Mask up MA! : https://www.mass.gov/news/mask-up-ma

BELMONT IS HOME TO THE

MASKED MARAUDERS

Double Masking

As new variants of COVID-19 have emerged, there is evidence that these variants can transmit more easily between people. In order to combat this, doubling up on mask layers may increase your protection from COVID-19 transmission, especially within more crowded indoor spaces. At this time, there are a couple of different options for how to increase your protection with masks.

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- Double mask
    - Wear a surgical mask with a cloth mask over top as a second layer
- Filter in multi-layer mask
    - Wear cloth masks with three breathable fabric layers, and insert a filter for added protection, made from non-woven material, like vacuum bags

CDC Info on mask improvements: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7007e1.htm
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/effective-masks.html

Dates for Remaining Vaccine Eligibility Groups

The Commonwealth's detailed timeline adheres to the original timeline for the three phases announced in December. All residents can preregister to book an appointment at a mass vaccination site at mass.gov/COVIDVaccine. Appointments will be offered based on eligibility and available appointments nearby. It is expected that more sites will come online as part of the preregistration process in April. The full timeline is available at mass.gov/COVIDVaccinePhases.

Timeline for remaining groups:

- **April 19th**: General public ages 16 years of age and older

Vaccinating Homebound Residents in Belmont

In partnership with our neighboring Health Departments, Belmont has initiated an effort backed by the state to provide in-home vaccination to eligible homebound residents. The state is supplying vaccine specifically for this purpose, so the Health Department is currently compiling a list to ascertain the number of residents who need and are interested in this opportunity.
In order to participate in this program, individuals are asked to identify their eligibility in two ways. First, they must be in one of the phase groups that are currently eligible for vaccine at the time of their vaccination. Second, they must meet the Department of Public Health's definition of a homebound resident. The criteria to identify as a homebound resident for these purposes are listed below:

- Individuals who are not able to leave their home to get to a vaccination site without significant assistance
- These individuals either:
    - Require ambulance or two person assist to leave the home
    - Are not able to leave the home for medical appointments under normal circumstances
    - Have considerable difficulty and/or require significant support to leave the home for medical appointments

If you or someone you know qualifies as a homebound individual, please fill out the Belmont Health Department's Vaccine Survey on the town website, or call our office at 617-993-2720. This survey has been updated to gather more information on homebound residents. The direct survey link can be found here: https://forms.gle/7fo8ztJbRBU2aCKL9

Vaccine Preregistration Signup Tool

The State's preregistration system allows eligible residents to book an appointment at one of the state's 7 mass vaccination sites, and not yet eligible residents to enter their information to be saved until they are eligible. After completing the online form, residents will get a confirmation via their

preferred method of contact (text, e-mail, phone) and receive a weekly update about their status. Residents may opt out of their preregistration at any time if they secure an appointment elsewhere. More sites will be added to the preregistration system in the coming weeks. The COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling Resource Line will be available to help residents without internet access or with difficulty using the internet with the preregistration process.

This tool is available at www.mass.gov/COVIDvaccine

When an appointment becomes available at a mass vaccination site, the resident will be notified and will have 24 hours to accept the appointment once it is offered to them. If an appointment is not accepted after 24 hours, the resident will go back into the queue to wait for another appointment.

To accommodate older residents and others who are unable to use the form, the preregistration form allows family members, caregivers or other companions to fill out the form on behalf of someone else. Residents who do not have internet access or someone to fill the form out for them can call 2-1-1 to preregister.
The preregistration system replaces the weekly appointment release on Thursdays for mass vaccination sites only. Eligible residents will need to preregister online or contact the call center to request an appointment for a mass vaccination site.

Belmont COVID-19 Vaccination and Planning

For the time being, the state will not be distributing more COVID vaccine to local health departments or collaboratives. At this time, we do not have any information on if or when we might receive any additional first doses for local clinics. We are strongly encouraging residents to not plan on being able to receive a vaccine from a town operated clinic, and to pursue other available options.

Submit your request to be alerted to future Belmont clinics by priority group, and to receive updates on vaccine availability across the state here: https://forms.gle/7fo8ztJbRBU2aCKL9

The Belmont Health Department will also use this contact list to provide updated vaccine availability information by priority group, as well as to gather information about how residents receive information about COVID-19. We thank residents in advance for their patience as we all await the arrival of more vaccine to be distributed. If you are currently eligible to receive vaccination and have the ability, we encourage you to seek a vaccine through a vaccination site found here:
https://www.mass.gov/CovidVaccineMap

Reopening: Phase IV

All communities in Massachusetts have moved into Step 1 of Phase IV of the state's reopening plan. This has opened a range of previously closed business sectors under tight capacity restrictions that are expected to be adjusted over time if favorable trends in the public health data continue. Effective on the planned advancement to Step 1 of Phase IV, the following industries will be permitted to operate at a strict 12% capacity limit after submitting a plan to the Department of Public Health (DPH):

- Indoor and outdoor stadiums
- Arenas
- Ballparks

Additionally, dance floors will be permitted at weddings and other events only, and overnight summer camps will be allowed to operate this coming summer. Exhibition and convention halls may also begin to operate, following gatherings limits and event protocols. Other Phase IV sectors must continue to remain closed. Updated summer camp guidance can be found here.

Updated Gathering Limits

Also effective **March 22**, gathering limits for event venues and in public settings increased to 100 people indoors and 150 people outdoors. Outdoor gatherings at private residences and in private backyards remain at a maximum of 25 people, with indoor house gatherings remaining at 10 people.

Travel Advisory Update

The Massachusetts Travel Order has been replaced with a Travel Advisory.
All visitors entering Massachusetts, including returning residents, are advised to quarantine for 10 days upon their arrival.

- Travelers are exempt from this advisory if they have a negative COVID-19 test result that has been administered up to 72 hours prior to their arrival in Massachusetts. If not obtained before entry to Massachusetts, a test may be obtained after arrival, as long as travelers quarantine until a negative test result has been received.
- Anyone who is returning to Massachusetts after an absence of fewer than 24 hours is exempt from this advisory.
- Workers who enter Massachusetts to perform critical infrastructure functions (as specified by the Federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency) are exempt from this advisory while they are commuting to or from or while at work.
- Travelers who are fully vaccinated (i.e. who have received two doses of either the Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines OR who have received a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, 14 days or more ago) and who do not have symptoms are exempt from this advisory.

Travelers are encouraged to consult and follow the CDC's guidelines and requirements for travel:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html

Indoor Dining Guidance

Below is a summary of the state's important Safety Guidelines for Restaurants.

- Face coverings are required for all customers and workers at all times when inside of a restaurant, with the following exceptions:
  - If an individual is unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition
  - When a customer is eating at their table **(*Customers may only remove masks while eating inside a restaurant, they must be kept on at all other times at the table)***
- Alcoholic beverages can only be served if accompanied by food prepared onsite
  - Potato chips, popcorn, or other pre-packaged foods are not considered to be food prepared on-site
  - Shareable food items may be ordered, but the order must be large enough to sufficiently serve the number of people at the table
- Tables are required to be set up and positioned in a manner to maintain a 6-foot distance from all other surrounding tables and any high foot traffic areas
  - Tables are allowed to be positioned closer together if they are separated by a protective/non-porous barrier (such as plexiglass) that is at least 6-feet high and installed between tables and high foot traffic areas.
  - The size of a party seated at a table cannot exceed 6 people, and diners are encouraged to only dine with those from their own household
- Bar seating is allowed, but…

- There can be no active work going on in the area behind the bar, unless workers and customers are separated by at least 6-feet of physical distance.
- This distance may be lessened if there is a physical non-porous barrier of 30-inches in height on top of the bar that separates the two parties.
- Additionally, parties must be seated at bars for service (no standing customer service) and parties must be spaced at least 6-feet from other parties.

- Finally, as going out to eat is often viewed as a social event, the state is discouraging people from lingering at food service establishments.
  - R**estaurants must impose a 90 minute dining time limit for tables**
  - Go in and order your food, eat your meal, pay for it, and leave as soon as possible.
  - Tips to help minimize your time inside of a restaurant include:
    - Call ahead to make a reservation, Preview the menu ahead of time

Understanding Quarantine and Isolation

It is important to make sure everyone understands and can prepare for the possibility of you or a loved one needing to quarantine or isolate.

Quarantine is for individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19, but are not sick and have not tested positive. Quarantine is typically 14 days long. While the CDC and DPH have released guidance for shortened quarantine under certain circumstances, the town of Belmont continues to recommend that individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19 complete the full 14 day quarantine to help stop the spread and practice maximum prevention.

Isolation is for individuals who are sick or who have tested positive for COVID-19. Isolation is typically 10 days long, but may be longer if you develop severe or lingering symptoms.

If you test positive for COVID-19, or someone you've been close to tests positive, expect a call from one of our contact tracers. The call may not come from a local number, but it's important to answer the phone. If you miss the call, contact tracers will leave a voicemail, please call us back if you receive a message from us.

In both quarantine and isolation, you must remain in your home, and remain separate from anyone you share a household with. Preferably, not utilizing any common areas, like living rooms and kitchens, and using separate bathrooms wherever possible.

If you haven't already, take the time to discuss with your family or household your plan for potential quarantine and isolation situations. Think about how you will get things like groceries, prescriptions and other necessities, and if there are others in your community you might offer to help if they go into quarantine or isolation as well.

More information on isolation and quarantine can be found here: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/tips-to-make-covid-19-isolation-and-quarantine-easier

Quarantine Updates: Post-Vaccination Guidance

Massachusetts has adopted the CDC changes to the quarantine guidance for individuals who have been fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated is defined as follows: Individuals having received either two doses of Pfizer/Moderna, or the single dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine, who are at least 14 days out from their final dose. For those individuals, both the exposure quarantine guidance and the travel guidance have been updated. If a fully vaccinated individual is exposed to COVID-19/considered a close contact, they are not required to quarantine, as long as they meet the fully vaccinated criteria

and are not experiencing any symptoms. In regards to travelling, those who are fully vaccinated are not required to quarantine or get tested upon their entry/re-entry into Massachusetts, as long as they meet the fully vaccinated criteria and do not experience any symptoms. If a fully vaccinated person does experience symptoms, they should still seek a test and isolate while waiting for their results. This guidance has not changed. This information can be found here and here.

COVID-19 Testing – Updates and Tips

Project Beacon Sites

Project Beacon runs appointment-based testing sites throughout the Commonwealth. They specialize in high-volume testing scheduled through an online platform. Each Project Beacon site can test at least 1,000 individuals per day. Some sites are drive through, so be sure to read the instructions for whichever site you choose. More information on new Massachusetts testing expansion Here. Sign up for testing through Project Beacon Here.

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

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

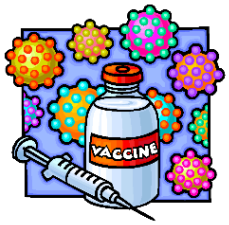
Where can I get a test?

Please visit this page to enter your zip code and find a testing site near you: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/find-a-covid-19-test
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.

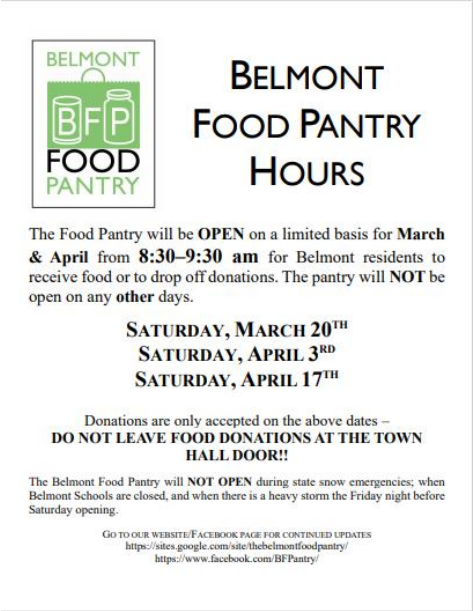
Flu Shots for those without Insurance, or who are underinsured



The Belmont Health Department is currently offering flu shots for those who are under or uninsured. These will be given by appointment only. Please call the Health Department at 617-993-2720 if you are interested in scheduling an appointment, have any questions about this service, or for further information.

Belmont Food Pantry: March and April Hours

The Belmont Food Pantry will be open to distribute food from 8:30 – 10:00 a.m. on the dates listed. The distribution will still be a drive-thru with everyone remaining in their car, pulling up to the volunteer to check in and another volunteer will put the bag(s), per family, into the car. Walkers PLEASE keep a distance from each other and Food Pantry volunteers WILL COME to you. Belmont residents who are coming to receive food, please remember to bring your ID and have it ready before you get to the check in. Click here for the application and instructions: https://sites.google.com/…/thebelmont…/home/new-client-forms



BELMONT FOOD PANTRY

BELMONT FOOD PANTRY HOURS

The Food Pantry will be **OPEN** on a limited basis for **March & April** from **8:30–9:30 am** for Belmont residents to receive food or to drop off donations. The pantry will **NOT** be open on any **other** days.

SATURDAY, MARCH 20TH
SATURDAY, APRIL 3RD
SATURDAY, APRIL 17TH

Donations are only accepted on the above dates –
DO NOT LEAVE FOOD DONATIONS AT THE TOWN HALL DOOR!!

The Belmont Food Pantry will **NOT OPEN** during state snow emergencies; when Belmont Schools are closed, and when there is a heavy storm the Friday night before Saturday opening.

GO TO OUR WEBSITE/FACEBOOK PAGE FOR CONTINUED UPDATES
https://sites.google.com/site/thebelmontfoodpantry/
https://www.facebook.com/BFPantry/

Federal Rental Assistance Information

The federal government has made $25 billion available for emergency rental assistance. Massachusetts will receive $457 million in total with $20.6 million going directly to Boston and $15.5 million going directly to Plymouth County. The state will have about $420 million to use for emergency rental assistance. While guidance was issued by the US Treasury in January under the Trump Administration, the Biden Administration is expected to issue revised guidance. Massachusetts is awaiting the guidance before distributing the new funds.

There is funding available for tenants and homeowners for emergency rental and mortgage assistance. In addition to the $350,000 that Belmont has been spending on emergency rental assistance (funded through the Community Preservation Act), the state is providing assistance through the following programs available to tenants, homeowners, and landlords.

- More than $100 million in emergency rental assistance through Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) and Emergency Rental & Mortgage Assistance (ERMA). Households can apply for up to $10,000 from these programs through Metro Housing Boston: https://www.metrohousingboston.org/.
- Tenants and landlords can access legal representation and related services prior to and during the eviction process, as well as community mediation to bring tenants and landlords together to find a resolution. Tenants and owner-occupants can access legal help through the COVID Eviction Legal Help Project: https://evictionlegalhelp.org/about/. Mediation services can be accessed at Resolution Massachusetts: https://www.resolutionma.org/.
- If you have any questions about rental or mortgage assistance, please call 2-1-1.
- More information on the Massachusetts Eviction Diversion Initiative can be found here: https://www.mass.gov/guides/facing-eviction-we-can-help

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When Belmont started our own emergency rental assistance program, the Housing Trust sent letters to every landlord in the assessor's database with information about Belmont's program and information for tenants. As our local program is winding down, our program administrator, Metro West Collaborative Development, is referring people to RAFT for emergency rental assistance.
Information provided by Rachel Heller, Belmont Housing Trust Co-Chair https://www.belmont-ma.gov/housing-trust

COVID-19 and Emergency Preparedness

Tropical Storm Isaias as well as increased COVID-19 activity throughout the country highlighted the need to continue to think about emergency preparedness, as well as preparedness for COVID-19. Please see our Preparedness Tips document on the COVID-19 update page here: https://www.belmont-ma.gov/home/urgent-alerts/covid-19-information-for-the-town-of-belmont-find-all-updates-here

Belmont Helps: Ways to Help Our Community

Donate | Volunteer | Ask for Help | Find Resources | Request or Help Sew Masks
Belmont Helps, a Winn Brook Parent Teacher Association Committee, is a 100% volunteer organization founded on March 14, 2020 to connect Belmont area community members in need during the COVID-19 outbreak to resources and volunteers. More information can be found at www.belmonthelps.org. Contact belmonthelps@gmail.com or leave a message at (617) 993-0162 for a call back from a team member.

COVID-19 Informational Call Center and Email

For general COVID-19 questions not specific to the Town of Belmont, all Massachusetts residents encouraged to call the state's 2-1-1 hotline that is staffed by operators 24/7 and with translators 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.

Please call 9-1-1 in the event of an emergency. Calls should not be made to 9-1-1 to obtain information about COVID-19.