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PUBLIC HEALTH WEEKLY UPDATE:
COVID-19
December 4, 2020

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 427 *cumulative* confirmed cases of COVID-19, which is an increase of 36 cases since our November 30 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.

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. While these sites are located in these communities, they are open to all residents of the Commonwealth, and residents do not need to have symptoms to be tested.

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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Updated: Calculating our Color-Coded Status

The way that Belmont's color is determined for the weekly data is by the average daily case rate per 100k people over the last 14 days. Recently, the metric for switching between colors was updated by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). Now in order for Belmont to hit the threshold for shifting to red for example, we would need to have an average of 10 or more cases per day per 100k people over the last 14 day period, **AND** have greater than or equal to a 5% testing positivity rate (The full description of the new metrics for Belmont's population size can be viewed in the adjacent image).

Color Calculations- Belmont
Population: 10k-50k

Grey: ≤10 total cases

Green: <10 Avg cases/100k AND >10 total cases

Yellow - ≥10 Avg cases/100k OR ≥5% positivity rate

Red - ≥10 Avg cases/100k AND >5% positivity rate

This is calculated and posted along with the case count in the State's weekly COVID community-level data update: (https://www.mass.gov/info-details/community-level-covid-19-data-reporting). This week we have an average daily case rate 14.6 per day per 100k people over the previous 14 days, calculated by using the town's population and the number of total new cases in that 14 day period.

Another point to clarify, is that the 14 day data is pulled weekly from the previous Saturday, going back two weeks from there. So for example, this week's data represents the previous two weeks, from Sunday 11/15 through Saturday 11/28. This schedule was put in place by MDPH, in order to allow time for cases to be accurately assigned to the correct towns in the database, and for test results to be correctly logged into MAVEN. As mentioned above, MDPH requires time to confirm data in MAVEN, which is the reason for this delay in reported data. The case count, however, posted at the end of each week is pulled from MAVEN that morning, so this number will always reflect the current standing, as does the number of new cases observed each week listed at the top of this document.

Belmont Public Schools COVID-19 Dashboard

As Belmont progresses further into the school year, there have been several requests for different kinds of information relating to COVID cases among the BPS community. In an effort to help provide timely information to members of the school community, the Belmont Health Department has worked with the School Department to put together a data dashboard to display this information. This includes information on the total number of cases among staff and students in Belmont Public Schools, whether they attended in person or remote around their diagnosis, and what schools they attend. New cases each week are identified, and then total cumulative cases are shown in a chart. This information has been accumulated and provided in a way that ideally maintains patient confidentiality while still providing community members with relevant information to their school experience this year. *There may be some differences in cases reported by date, as the dashboard shows cases by the date they are confirmed in MAVEN, and the letters go out based on when the School Department is notified and can confirm with the Health Department.*
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***

Reminder: Wearing your Mask

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 socially distance.

WHO Mask Guidance: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks

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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

Gaiters and Bandanas

- Plastic face shields should not be used as replacements for cloth face coverings
- Gaiters and bandanas are not recommended as effective face coverings
- They do not provide the same level of protection as the CDC recommended cloth face coverings based on the layers and the material, as well as the fit on the face

Stay at Home Advisory

The Governor's new Stay at Home Advisory went into effect on November 6, 2020 and consists of the following COVID-19 Orders:

- COVID-19 Order No. 53 – Early Closings and Alcohol Order
- COVID-19 Order No. 54 – Further Revised Gatherings Order
- COVID-19 Order No. 55 – Revised Face Coverings Order

A summary of the important parts of these Orders can be found below:

COVID-19 Order No.53

- The following industries and sectors must close their premises to the public each day by 9:30 PM and they cannot reopen until 5:00 AM the next day

- **Restaurants*
- *Arcade and Indoor/Outdoor recreation*
- *Indoor/Outdoor Events*
- *Theatre Performance Venues, Movie Theatres (indoor and Outdoor)*
- *Drive Ins*
- *Youth and Amateur Sports*
- *Golf*
- *Recreational Boating and Boating Businesses*
- *Outdoor recreational Experiences and Educational Activities*
- *Casino, Horse Racing Tracks, and Simulcast Facilities*
- *Driving and Flight Schools*
- *Zoos, Botanical Gardens, Wildlife Reserves and Nature Centers*
- *Close Contact Personal Services*
- *Fitness Centers and Health Clubs*
- *Indoor and Outdoor Pools*
- *Museums/Cultural & historical Facilities/Guided Tours*

***Note:**

- Restaurants cannot seat customers for dine-in-service from 9:30 PM to 5:00 AM; only takeout service is allowed during this time.
- All alcohol sales at restaurants, liquor stores, convenience stores is prohibited 9:30 PM to 5:00 AM

COVID-19 Order No.54

- Reduced gathering size limit for gatherings at private residences: indoor gatherings at private residences are limited to 10 people and outdoor gatherings at private residences are limited to 25 people.
- Outdoor gatherings at event venues and in public settings will have a limit of 50 people in Step I communities, and a limit of 100 people in lower risk, Step II communities.
- All gatherings must end and disperse by 9:30 pm

COVID-19 Order No.55

- Face coverings are now required to be worn by all persons in Massachusetts over the age of 5 years old, when in a public location, whether indoors or outdoors, and regardless of proximity to others.
    - Anyone with a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a face covering is exempt from this new order.

Indoor Dining Guidance

As the weather is getting colder, 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
    - There are a couple of exceptions for when a face mask is not required and they are:
        - If an individual is unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition
        - When a customer is seated at a table for dine-in service
    - *It is important to note that even though the state does not explicitly require face coverings to be used when you are seated at a table, it is strongly recommended that, when feasible, customers should try their best to keep their face masks on, at all times, when at their table, except when they may be actively eating or drinking. This is for the safety of your dining party as well as the employees of the restaurant.*
- **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 **10 people**
- **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.

- Be efficient with the time you spend in a restaurant.
- 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**

Emotional Health Resources

During stressful times it is common to have worries about yourself or a loved one. If you have questions about the types of treatment available, please contact **Health Department Social Worker Janet Amdur** at jamdur@belmont-ma.gov or (617) 993-2983.

Please remember to take care of your emotional health and help others to do the same. If you need emotional help please also consider making use of the following resources:

- Call 2-1-1 and choose the "CALL2TALK" option.
- The Samaritans helpline operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call or text their helpline any time at 1-877-870-4673.
- The Disaster Distress Helpline, 1-800-985-5990, is a national hotline, which also operates 24/7, to provide 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.
- The Beech Street Center is a local resource in Belmont that can help senior citizens address a variety of needs and access to social services.

Phase III Step II

Governor Baker announced that phase III step II would begin, effective Monday October 5, for those communities deemed lower risk. Lower risk communities are defined as cities and towns that have not been a "red" community in any of the last three weekly Department of Public Health (DPH) weekly reports. After a city or town begins step II, they will only regress to step I if they become red for three consecutive weeks. Belmont is currently considered lower risk, and will enter step II on Monday October 5.

As of October 5, a limited number of sectors will be eligible to reopen, with restrictions, in Step II of Phase III for lower risk communities only:

- Indoor performance venues will be permitted to open with 50% capacity with a maximum of 250 people - ***Note that singing at indoor performance venues is still not permitted during step II, and this includes restaurants as well***
- Outdoor performance venue capacity will increase to 50% with a max of 250 people
- For arcades and indoor and outdoor recreation businesses, additional Step II activities like trampolines, obstacle courses, roller rinks and laser tag will also be permitted to open and capacity will increase to 50%
- Fitting rooms will be permitted to open in all types of retail stores
- Gyms, museums, libraries and driving and flight schools will also be permitted to increase their capacity to 50%

Read more: **Governor's COVID-19 Order #51**

Revised Gatherings Order: Effective 11/6

- Reduced gathering size limit for gatherings at private residences: indoor gatherings at private residences are limited to 10 people and outdoor gatherings at private residences are limited to 25 people.
- Outdoor gatherings at event venues and in public settings will have a limit of 50 people in Step I communities, and a limit of 100 people in lower risk, Step II communities.
- All gatherings must end and disperse by 9:30 pm

Read more: **Governor's COVID-19 Order #54**

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.

Lower-Risk States Update

As per the August 1 travel order, there have been states added/removed to/from the lower-risk group that is exempt from testing/quarantine upon arriving into Massachusetts. This week, Vermont was removed from the list, effective 11/28. The **current list** of lower-risk states now only includes Hawaii.

For Current Info on Travel Restrictions and Procedures:
https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-travel-order

Belmont Food Pantry: November/December Hours

The Belmont Food Pantry will be open to distribute food from 8:30 – 10:00 a.m. on the dates listed above. 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

School Flu Shot Requirements

Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, influenza vaccine will be required for all students. Influenza vaccine is always important to receive to reduce the risk of getting sick with influenza, reduce the severity of disease if one does get sick (including the risk of hospitalization) due to influenza, as well as preventing the spread of influenza to others. During the COVID-19 pandemic, influenza vaccine will be especially critical to reduce the overall impact of respiratory illness on the population, protect vulnerable populations from severe illness, and decrease the overall burden on the healthcare system.

Which students need to receive influenza vaccine?
Students in Kindergarten – Grade 12 will be required to receive influenza vaccine for the current influenza season for school attendance unless they have a medical or religious exemption.

When do students need to receive influenza vaccine?
Students must receive influenza vaccine for the current season by **December 31, 2020**.

Are there any exemptions to receiving influenza vaccine?
Medical and religious exemptions are allowable in the state of Massachusetts.
What type of influenza vaccine can students receive?
Any age-appropriate licensed influenza vaccine for the current season fulfills the requirement. This includes injectable and nasal spray vaccine types.

Accessing influenza vaccines

- The Belmont Health Department will have enough flu vaccine available for those without health insurance or anyone that may be underinsured.
- Anyone with health insurance is strongly encouraged to contact local pharmacies and/or their primary care physician to schedule a time to get a flu shot.

For more information and full guidelines on this new requirement, visit:
https://www.mass.gov/news/flu-vaccine-now-required-for-all-massachusetts-school-students-enrolled-in-child-care-pre

COVID-19 and Emergency Preparedness

Tropical Storm Isaias as well as increased COVID-19 activity throughout the country have 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.

Belmont 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 on the Mass 2-1-1 website.

The Town of Belmont has also established a call center to allow residents to ask non-medical questions specific to COVID-19 in Belmont. The call center will be staffed Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm the number for the call center is (617) 993-2222. Questions can also be emailed to: **belmonteoc@belmont-ma.gov**. **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.**

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