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PUBLIC HEALTH WEEKLY UPDATE:
COVID-19
February 5, 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 944 *cumulative* confirmed cases of COVID-19, which is an increase of 30 cases since our January 29 report. There have been a total of 77 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, 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.

Belmont COVID-19 Vaccination Update and Planning

For the month of February, the state is expected to allot only 100 doses of the vaccine to Belmont per week, as is the case for many Massachusetts municipalities. Belmont's Health Department is working with its regional partners in the Arlington and Lexington Health Departments to conduct small weekly vaccine clinics within the state's vaccination plan. To streamline possible future clinics, and to be able to alert you of them, the Health Department is gathering contact information from residents interested in receiving the vaccine.

Submit your request to be alerted to upcoming Belmont clinics by priority group, and to receive updates on vaccine availability across the state here: https://forms.gle/6Dzz3pcj4sgSsmKGA

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

Find us on Facebook

Coming Soon: COVID-19 Vaccine Information Line

The Town of Belmont will soon activate a COVID-19 Vaccine call center to assist any residents who either do not have a computer or who may not feel comfortable using one to schedule appointments for vaccines. More information about this resource will be shared widely in the coming week.

***Note:** As of Friday, December 11th, the Town has temporarily suspended all appointments for in-person visits to Offices in the Town Hall and Homer Buildings.

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*

Masked Marauder Campaign

Belmont is now home to the Masked Marauder! Just like the Belmont marauder, it is important that you wear a mask when you leave your home. By wearing a mask, you are not only protecting yourself, but also your family, friends, neighbors, and all other residents of Belmont. You should be carrying a mask with you at all times, even when you are out for a walk or a run. The masked marauder is a reminder that we are all in this together. Whether you are exercising or meeting up with friends, make sure to mask up and prevent the spread of COVID-19. We must work together to protect our community.

BELMONT IS HOME TO THE

MASKED MARAUDERS

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 socially 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

Find us on Facebook

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.

- Double mask
  - Wear two masks
  - One of the best recommendations for this is to 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 Variant Information: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html

COVID-19 Vaccine Information

The Belmont Health Department will provide information on local vaccination clinics once we learn that we have been allocated enough vaccine by the state to hold large public clinics.
Additional information about COVID-19 vaccine planning and distribution for the Town of Belmont is available at the top of the Town of Belmont COVID-19 information page here: https://www.belmont-ma.gov/home/urgent-alerts/covid-19-information-for-the-town-of-belmont-find-all-updates-here

Updated: Sector-Specific Capacity Restrictions

Effective Monday, February 8th at 5:00 AM, those businesses and other sectors in Massachusetts currently limited to 25% capacity following an across the board capacity reduction on December 26, 2020 will be permitted to increase to a 40% capacity limit. Businesses and activities affected by the adjustment include:

- Arcades and Recreational Businesses
- Driving and Flight Schools
- Gyms/Health Clubs
- Libraries
- Museums
- Retail
- Offices
- Places of Worship
- Lodging (common areas)
- Golf (indoor areas)
- Movie Theaters (no more than 50 people per theater)

In addition, restaurants and close contact personal services will now be allowed to operate at a 40% capacity limit, which reflects an increase from the 25% limit imposed in December. As under the current 25% limit, workers and staff will not count towards the occupancy count for restaurants and close contact personal services.

The Commonwealth remains in Phase 3, Step 1 of the Baker-Polito Administration's reopening plan. Phase 3, Step 2 businesses, including indoor performance venues and indoor recreation businesses like roller rinks and trampoline parks, remain closed.

Gathering Limits

The current gathering limits, in place since December 26, are being extended. Indoor gatherings and events will remain limited to 10 people. Outdoor gatherings and events will remain limited to 25 people. The gathering limits apply equally to private homes, event venues, and other public spaces. Click here to read the updated gatherings order.

Return to Phase III Step I

As of December 13, all communities are in Phase 3, Step 1 of Massachusetts' reopening plan, including the following restrictions not already covered in the December 26th capacity restrictions:

- Indoor theaters and performance venues and higher contact indoor recreation businesses will be required to close to the public
- Outdoor theaters and performance venues will be limited to 25% capacity, and no more than 50 people
- Musical performances at restaurants will no longer be permitted
- Food court seating must be closed in malls
- Customers are encouraged to dine only with members of the same household
- Offices and Gyms
    - In offices, employees must wear masks at their place of work when not in their own workspace and alone
    - Employers are encouraged to close or limit the use of break rooms
    - Patrons must wear masks **at all times** in gyms
    - The Administration continues to encourage all employers to offer teleworking to their employees when possible.

Click here to read the order rolling Massachusetts back to Phase III, Step 1.

Understanding Quarantine and Isolation

As cases rise in Massachusetts, 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. Contact tracing helps to slow the spread of COVID-19 and we all need to do our part as cases rise in Massachusetts. Our contact tracers will help ensure that you and your family know what to do during quarantine or isolation, and make sure you are aware of the resources available to you during this time.

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

COVID-19 Testing – Updates and Tips

Project Beacon Sites

In addition to five new Stop the Spread (STS) locations, three current locations will expand to regional testing sites run by Project Beacon: New Bedford, Framingham and Lynn. Project Beacon currently operates a testing site in Revere and specializes in high-volume testing scheduled through an online platform. Each Project Beacon site will test at least 1,000 individuals per day. The sites are expected to be operational by the end of December, with the site in Framingham already operational as of 12/7.
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

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 can also find a fast fact sheet on Stop the Spread sites in proximity to Belmont at the top of the town COVID page: https://www.belmont-ma.gov/home/urgent-alerts/covid-19-information-for-the-town-of-belmont-find-all-updates-here

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 1travel 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.

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 of 24.2 on average 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, and a percent positivity of 2.42%.

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 1/17 through Saturday 1/30. 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.

Indoor Dining Guidance

As cases continue to rise, 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 eating, seated at a table, as a part of dine-in service **(*As of 12/13, 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.
    - Be efficient with the time you spend in a restaurant, **effective 12/13 restaurants 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

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. The current list of lower-risk states only includes Hawaii. For Full Info on Travel Restrictions and Procedures: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-travel-order

Belmont Food Pantry: January/February 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

School Flu Shot Requirements

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has removed the requirement for flu vaccination for attendance in childcare/preschool, primary, secondary and postsecondary education. Preliminary data show that this has been a mild flu season to date, presumably as people have received their seasonal flu vaccine and have been adhering to mask-wearing and social distancing due to COVID-19. Given the intensive Commonwealth-wide efforts regarding COVID-19 vaccination, DPH wants to alleviate the burden to obtain flu vaccination and focus on continuing our COVID -19 vaccination efforts.

DPH continues to strongly recommend that everyone age six months and older receive their seasonal flu vaccine each year.

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

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.

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 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.

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