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PUBLIC HEALTH WEEKLY UPDATE:
COVID-19
October 23, 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 daily on the Town's website.

The Town of Belmont currently has 283 *cumulative* confirmed cases of COVID-19, which is an increase of 8 cases since our October 16 report. The number of new cases over the last 14 days represents an increase in overall trend for the town of Belmont, in terms of new cases and percent testing positivity. There are 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 keeps Belmont in the **green** zone (<4 cases per day per 100k people, 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 Wednesdays.

Calculating our Status on the Color-Coded Map

The way that Belmont's color is determined for the weekly map is the average daily case rate per 100k people over the last 14 days. So in order for Belmont to hit the threshold for shifting to yellow for example, we would need to have an average of 4 cases **per day** per 100k people over the last 14 day period. This is calculated and posted along with the case count in the State's weekly COVID map update (https://www.mass.gov/info-details/community-level-covid-19-data-reporting). This week we have an average daily case rate of 2.9 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.

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COVID-19 Reporting Issues in MAVEN

The Massachusetts Virtual Epidemiological 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.

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 **required** when you are outside of your home and cannot distance yourself at least 6 feet from those around you.

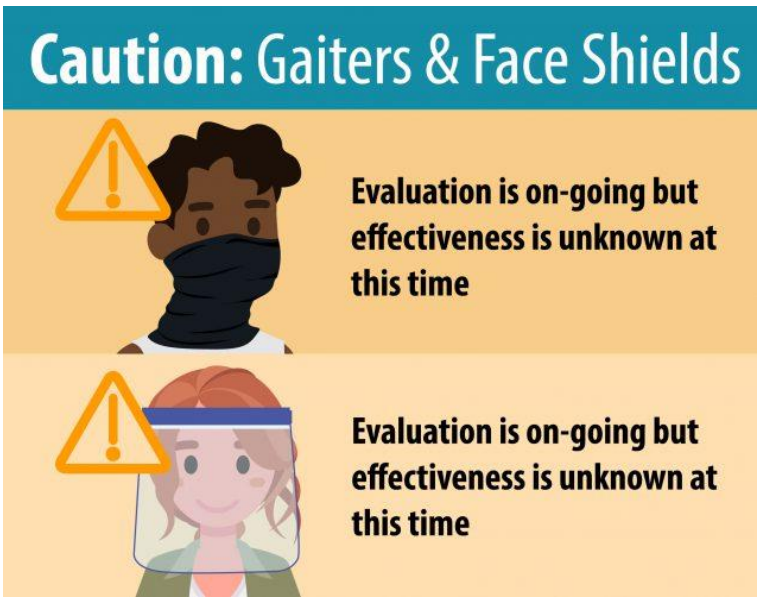
WHO Mask Guidance: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks

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



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Halloween

Below are tips on how you can participate in a safer Halloween this year:

HALLOWEEN 2020

Keep yourself, your loved ones, and Belmont safe this Halloween by following the CDC and MA Department of Public Health COVID-19 guidelines below.

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Belmont Health Department
(617) 993-2720

General reminders

- Wear a face mask
- Wash hands frequently
- Maintain social distancing
- Stay home if you feel unwell
- Avoid touching your face
- Indoor gatherings are not recommended
- Limit outdoor gatherings of non-household members

Gatherings at private residences are limited to 25 people indoors and 50 people outdoors. For indoor and outdoor gatherings of more than 10 people where participants other than those in the same household will be in attendance, all persons over the age of 2 must wear a face covering unless they have a medical condition. For more details, see Governor's COVID-19 Order No. 52.

Trick-or-Treating

Modifications to traditional door-to-door trick-or-treating can help protect everyone's safety. Please follow these simple guidelines to minimize the spread of COVID-19:

FOR TRICK-OR-TREATERS

- Trick-or-treat with those from your household
- Maintain 6 feet physical distance from anyone not in your household.
- Avoid large groups or clustering at doorsteps.
- Wear a protective face mask, in addition to your Halloween costume, that covers your nose and mouth and is effective at limiting the spread of COVID-19 (See the Mask Up MA webpage).
- Carry hand-sanitizer and use frequently while trick-or-treating.
- Do not eat anything until you return home and have thoroughly washed your hands with soap and water.
- Do not participate in Halloween activities if you are feeling unwell, exhibit any COVID-19 symptoms have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, or have recently traveled to a higher risk state.

FOR THOSE HANDING OUT TREATS

- Plan ahead to give trick-or-treaters pre-packaged treat bags of candy.
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after preparing treat bags or candy for trick-or-treaters.
- It is strongly recommend to line up pre-packed treat bags for families to take outside while maintaining social distancing, such as at the end of a driveway or yard.
- Wear a mask and maintain 6 feet physical distance from any trick-or-treaters.

RESIDENTS NOT WISHING TO HAND OUT CANDY

- Do not answer your door
- Turn off porch light
- Place a note on your door indicating you are not participating

AVOID THE FOLLOWING HIGH RISK ACTIVITIES

- ✕ Do **NOT** attend crowded indoor costume parties
- ✕ Do **NOT** go to an indoor haunted house where people may be crowded together & screaming.
- ✕ Do **NOT** participate in activities like hayrides or tractor rides if you cannot socially distance 6 feet from other participants who are not in your household.

For more information on Halloween COVID-19 guidelines, visit:

Mass.gov: Halloween During COVID-19

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Holiday Celebrations (Halloween)

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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.

On 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

- The limit for indoor gatherings remains at a maximum of 25 people for all communities.
- Outdoor gatherings at private residences and in private backyards will remain at a maximum of 50 people for all communities.
- 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.

Read more: **Governor's COVID-19 Order #52**

COVID-19 Community Impact Survey

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MA-DPH) is still hoping to hear from communities so that it can better help people through the COVID-19 crisis. By taking this survey, you can help find new solutions to community problems, and give MA-DPH the information they need to take action and support the communities that need it most. MA-DPH is committed to sharing information back in ways that will help us all take collective action. The survey has been extended to remain **open until October 30th**, and is now available in eleven common languages spoken in MA: English, Chinese (standard and traditional), Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Arabic, Cape Verdean Creole, Khmer, and Russian. This effort will help us better understand the impact of COVID-19 on our communities, and we **encourage anyone who is 14 years old or older to participate** using this link: **www.mass.gov/COVIDsurvey**

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. There have been no changes made this week. The **current list** of lower-risk states is as follows: California, Connecticut, Washington, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Vermont, and Washington D.C.

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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

Belmont 2020 Elections

- November 3, 2020: **Presidential Election**

Voting by Mail is available for all elections. You can get an application on the town website: https://www.belmont-ma.gov/town-clerk or by contacting the Town Clerk's office
By **Phone** 617-993-2603 or **email**: townclerk@belmont-ma.gov

Early Voting is currently taking place at town hall, until October 30th.

Check your Massachusetts voter registration status

14-Day City and Town Level Data

Link to the COVID-19 Weekly Public Health Report, which can be found here:
https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting#covid-19-weekly-public-health-report-

For Current Info on Travel Restrictions and Procedures:

https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-travel-order

COVID-19 Testing

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

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

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

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.

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 new August 1 travel requirements, the test that is required to forego your 14 day quarantine is Molecular or 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.

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.**