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BERKSHIRE COUNTY BOARDS OF HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Pittsfield, MA March 18, 2020 12:00pm

Update on COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and Local Boards of Health (LBOH)

Please note: This is a rapidly evolving situation. Infection numbers are likely to change. BCBOHA will continue to provide updates and coordinate public messaging on the situation on a regular basis.

Latest News:

The Baker-Polito Administration has made money available to local municipalities essentially immediately to address public health costs incurred in responding to this outbreak. Funds will flow directly to the 14 largest cities in the state (only Springfield in Western Mass) and through the 15 existing health districts known to DPH, including the Berkshire Public Health Alliance and Tri-Town Health in Berkshire County. Municipalities that do not fit into either category will be aligned with a regional entity across the state, including several regional planning agencies, MHOA and MAHB. In Berkshire County, if your town is not part of either district, you will be aligned with Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. Information was sent directly to the BOH in Berkshire County through BCBOHA Tuesday night; thank you to all who responded or who spoke to us today. If you have additional thoughts about costs that may be incurred or that have already been incurred just contact us. We hope to have a system set up to distribute funds by the end of the week.

Guidelines for Public Events and Food Service:

On March 15th the Baker Administration put forth guidance prohibiting gatherings of over 25 people, including restaurants and bars. Any restaurant, bar, or establishment that offers food or drink should not permit on-site consumption of food or drink, but may continue to offer food for takeout and by delivery provided that they follow social distancing protocols that allow individuals to stay six feet apart. The guidance can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/march-15-2020-assembly-guidance/download>

BOH should reach out to their Food Establishments to see which ones are still open and what kind of food service they are providing and to ensure that all food service is being conducted safely. The Berkshire Public Health Alliance and BCBOHA are working on guidance for Food Establishments, including sanitation chemicals and procedures, employee hygiene, and illness monitoring and reporting and will distribute when ready.

Reporting Addresses to Emergency Personnel:

Commissioner Monica Bharel signed several public health orders today, including an order requiring Local Boards of Health to disclose the addresses – but no other identifying information -- of those diagnosed with COVID-19 to the official in charge of emergency calls in the jurisdiction. That information can only be used for responding to emergency calls and is to be kept confidential. **Please let your public health nurse know who should get this information in your municipality so that they can share appropriately.**

Local Schools and School Closings:

On March 15, 2020 Governor Charlie Baker announced a three-week suspension of school operations at public and private elementary and secondary (K-12) schools in the commonwealth beginning Tuesday, March 17th and going through April 6. Berkshire County schools were already closed until March 30, and that date will now be extended to April 6 in accordance with the Governor's order. Food for those who ordinarily receive free or reduced school breakfast or lunch is available in many municipalities.

Childcare Operations:

On March 18, Governor Baker issued an Executive Order requiring all early education centers and family childcare providers to close, starting Monday March 23. Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs will be the only childcare programs able to operate. Families who work to maintain the health, safety, and welfare of all Commonwealth citizens will receive priority access to emergency childcare programs and these centers should only be used by people who must go to work. Vulnerable children will also receive priority access and space will be made for people who must go to work but aren't necessarily emergency personnel.

Testing in Berkshire County:

Berkshire Medical Center is in the process of setting up a drive through COVID-19 testing facility on Seymour Street in Pittsfield. At this time all testing requires a physician order. Public Health Nurses in the county have been asked to refer close contacts of cases experiencing symptoms to call the BMC hotline. After hotline screening, those qualified will be referred for a telemedicine appointment with a physician, and if appropriate, given an order and a time for testing. It is expected that in the near future testing will open up to others with symptoms as well, but is at this writing restricted to contacts with symptoms.

Emergency Operations:

The Northern Berkshire REPC has been activated and has set up a regional command center in North County. Central and South County are in the process of standing up their REPCs, although the actual extent of that activation remains unclear.

Town Hall and Public Building Closures:

Most town halls and other public buildings throughout the county have either closed or restricted public access. Open Meeting Law has been temporarily amended to allow meetings to be held remotely and to restrict public access to the actual meeting. Many non-essential meetings have been cancelled. An updated list of closures can be found on the BCBOHA website.

Situation Report:

Recently, a new strain of coronavirus—2019 Novel (new) Coronavirus (COVID-19)—was detected in Wuhan, China. This novel coronavirus causes a respiratory (lung) infection. This new virus is related to, but different from, other coronaviruses that cause the common cold and diseases such as SARS and MERS. Common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, shortness of breath and in severe cases, pneumonia (fluid in the lungs). Cases range from very mild to severe.

As of March 18, there have been 256 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts. Seventeen of those cases are in Berkshire County. There have been 4,226 reported cases in the United States,

with 38 states and the District of Columbia reporting cases, and 75 deaths. The States with the highest number of cases include Washington, California, New York and Massachusetts. The CDC has confirmed that there is community spread of COVID-19 in several states across the U.S.

Updated daily information on Massachusetts' case reports can be found at: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-cases-quarantine-and-monitoring>.

Updated daily information (Monday-Friday) on US cases can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>.

On March 10, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts which gives the state more flexibility in how it responds to the COVID-19 outbreak. On March 11, the World Health Organization categorized the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic. On March 13, 2020 the President declared the COVID-19 outbreak a National Emergency. Among many functions, this declaration allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to waive or modify requirements of the Medicare, Medicaid, and State Children's Health Insurance programs and of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act Privacy Rule throughout the duration of the declared emergency.

BCBOHA plans to send out weekly Board of Health memos, such as this one, each week within 24 hours of the weekly conference call between the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Local Boards of Health. The BCBOHA has also held an initial convening of a COVID-19 Working Group made up of Health Agents, Public Health Nurses, Health Directors, Members and BCBOHA Executive Committee Members from around the County.

Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):

The CDC is recommending personal preparedness and protective measures, including Personal Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs). NPIs are measures taken to help prevent the spread of diseases that do not include medications. Currently, there are no medications or vaccinations available to prevent COVID-19, however, everyone should practice these respiratory illness prevention protocols:

- diligent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- cover your mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
- stay home from school, work and other people when you become sick with respiratory symptoms like fever or a cough
- avoid close contact (within 6 feet) of people who are sick
- if you are over the age of 60 or have underlying health conditions you should stay home as much as possible.
- <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/personal/index.html>

Isolation and Quarantine (I&Q):

The DPH provided updated forms on March 11, 2020 adapted for COVID-19 Isolation and Quarantine, which will be available on the BCBOHA website. BCBOHA will also be posting the PowerPoint from their in-person Isolation and Quarantine training on March 10th on the BCBOHA website. Please make sure that your Board is familiar with isolation and quarantine, as you may be called on to issue orders over the next few weeks. In most cases, your public health nurse, acting

on behalf of your board of health will issue verbal isolation and quarantine orders, and will then report that to the board of health. There may be times when a written order in the form of a letter will be necessary, and in rare occasions a formal order or even court action may become necessary. It is important that you are familiar with the regulations prior to needing them. Please remember to respect the privacy of your residents, and conduct isolation and quarantine business in a closed executive session. If you missed the BCBOHA training, and would like to do an online training, you may use the following link to access the Local Public Health Institute Training:

Isolation & Quarantine On Your Time Training:

<http://sites.bu.edu/masslocalinstitute/2015/12/11/isolation-and-quarantine/>

MAVEN and Case Identification:

Posting of cases should be happening in a more timely manner going forward as the DPH is automating the flow between laboratory testing of COVID-19 test kits and posting to MAVEN. Please have your Public Health Nurse or Board check your MAVEN twice a day during this period, including on weekends. If your community does have a case, DPH will also call your Public Health Nurse or Board directly. Please ensure that DPH has your correct contact information, that your public health nurse has a cell phone number for at least one staff or member of your board of health and that you have the cell phone number of your public health nurse. If you are a community not currently on MAVEN, please contact BCBOHA to initiate that process.

Calls to your BOH:

If your BOH receives a call from someone experiencing respiratory symptoms or if a provider in your area receives a call from someone experiencing symptoms, please call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) 24/7 Epidemiology line at (617) 983-6800 for assistance and the latest recommendations for managing a Person Under Investigation (PUI). Individuals experiencing symptoms of a respiratory illness can also call the new Berkshire Health Systems Hotline at 855-262-5465 between the hours of 7am and 7pm, 7 days/week. We are encouraging every Board to work with your Emergency Management Director in your community to encourage citizens to get signed up for your outgoing-911 alert system.

Higher Risk Populations in your Community:

The CDC has identified older adults, individuals with heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease, as well as individuals with compromised immune systems to be of higher risk for more severe symptoms of COVID-19. Individuals who fall within these categories should practice greater person precautions, and discuss having extra medical supplies and medications on hand with their doctor. Guidance for long-term care facilities can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/prevent-spread-in-long-term-care-facilities.html> and guidance for high-risk individuals can be found here, including guidance for people who care for those that are high risk: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhigh-risk%2Fhigh-risk-complications.html

Questions from the General Public and Worried-Well:

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and United Way 211 call and information service is now operating 24/7, and is answering calls for community members who are not sick, but would like to receive information related to COVID-19.

PPE Supplies from Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) and Emergency Federal Funding:

Guidance from DPH is expected soon on a process for the release of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies, such as masks, gowns and goggles, from the SNS or distributions of local emergency funds passed by Congress last week. BCBOHA Staff are working with DPH on the process by which PPE can be distributed to public health in the region.

Please only use reputable sources for information gathering. Further information can be found at the following links. We recommend that you do not make multiple copies of fact sheets for your BOH office at this time as they are changing on a daily basis.

With questions, Please Contact Allison Egan by email at aegan@berkshireplanning.org.

MDPH Information on COVID-19: <https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

HMCC Resources: <https://region1hmcc.org/>

CDC General Information Page on COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

CDC Communication Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>

MDPH Printable Fact Sheets: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/information-on-the-outbreak-of-2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19#-printable-fact-sheets->

CDC Response Page: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html#cdc-response>

CDC Cases in the US: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>

CDC Guidance for Medical Professionals: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>

CDC Information on Travel: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

CDC Information for Businesses & Travelers: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fguidance-business-response.html