



TOWN OF BEDFORD
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BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS 01730

Bedford Public Schools Update on COVID-19

May 19, 2020

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The Bedford COVID-19 Task Force met May 19, 2020 to review the latest guidance from the Department of Public Health (DPH), the office of Governor Charlie Baker, and Town Legal Counsel.

The COVID-19 Task Force is comprised of the following Town officials:

Sarah Stanton, Town Manager
Jon Sills, Superintendent of Schools
Heidi Porter, Director of Health and Human Services
Robert Bongiorno, Police Chief
David Grunes, Fire Chief
Taissir Alani, Facilities Director

Current Case Report

As of today, May 19, 2020, there have been a total of one eighty-five (185) positive cases of COVID-19 reported to the Town of Bedford Board of Health by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MA DPH) and thirty-six (36) deaths of Bedford residents attributed to COVID-19. The total case number includes residents of the Town of Bedford, including but not limited to those in: single-family homes, apartments, the VA campus, Hanscom Air Force Base, special needs group homes and any and all other larger assisted living/care facilities in Bedford as reported to us by the MA DPH.

As you may be aware, long-term care facilities serving the elderly and congregate care facilities, house susceptible populations with underlying conditions who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Increased testing occurs at these facilities and results in more positive cases being identified. As such, cities and towns with these facilities, like Bedford, experience elevated positive case counts and, unfortunately, deaths due to the vulnerability to COVID-19 of the populations within those facilities.

Forty-three (43) of the total Bedford cases have already recovered and have come off of isolation and there may other Bedford residents who would be considered persons under investigation in that they are symptomatic, have undergone testing but have not yet received results. There are other individuals impacted by COVID-19 in

the community that have not sought medical attention, and/or have not been tested and are isolating at home regardless. Those individuals do not appear on the surveillance reports the Town receives from the MA DPH.

The Board of Health continues to do the appropriate follow-up and outreach to those residents and close contacts known to us and the VA is conducting follow-up and contact tracing of the Veteran's under their care. Many of the identified close contacts of some of the Bedford cases never exhibited symptoms, have completed their required quarantine period and have been released from quarantine by the Board of Health.

Please note, in part to alleviate the community concern, the VA does do a daily report of their numbers, which includes inpatients, outpatients and staff, many of whom do not call Bedford home. The information can be found here: <https://www.accesstocare.va.gov/Healthcare/COVID19NationalSummary>

Important Updates

Who's at risk for COVID-19?

Based on currently available information and clinical expertise, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions appear to be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Based on what we know now, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

- People 65 years and older
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including:
 - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
 - People who have serious heart conditions
 - People who are immunocompromised. Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications
 - People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
 - People with diabetes
 - People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
 - People with liver disease

If you are in one of these vulnerable populations, regardless of allowable access to public areas and essential services, it is strongly advised that you:

- Stay home, if possible;
- Wash your hands often;
- Keep space between yourself and others (stay 6 feet away, which is about two arm lengths); and,
- Wear a mask when you cannot safely socially distance.

Continue to Slow the Spread

Social distancing, staying home except for necessary, essential and allowable errands, frequent handwashing, use of sanitizer, regular sanitizing of common-touch surfaces and wearing a face covering when you must go out in public, are all the ways we can all slow the spread of COVID-19. Wearing a face covering does not make it OK to gather and/or socialize with others. This action is meant to protect others from your respiratory droplets when you must leave your home for necessary errands and activities. Remember people may have the virus and be asymptomatic and contagious all at the same time. Staying home and avoiding close contact with others is still the BEST and most protective option to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Checking-in on Mental Health, Stress and Anxiety during COVID-19

The daily news reports, social media posts and even the case numbers reported in our own daily Town of Bedford update on COVID-19 can be daunting and information overload in a time where there are few outlets for relief. With some businesses and services starting to open, fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. The emotional impact of an emergency on a person can depend on the person's characteristics and experiences, the social and economic circumstances of the person and their community, and the availability of local resources. People can become more distressed if they see repeated images or hear repeated reports about the outbreak in the media.

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- People who have preexisting mental health conditions including problems with substance use;
- Children; and,
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders.

Reactions during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health status and that of your loved ones who may have been exposed to COVID-19
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns;
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating;
- Worsening of chronic health problems; and,
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

Coping with these feelings and getting help when you need it will help you, your family, and your community recover from a disaster. Connect with family, friends, and others in your community. Take care of yourself and each other, and know when and how to seek help. Call your healthcare provider if stress reactions interfere with your daily activities for several days in a row.

Things you can do to support yourself:

- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. Try to do some other activities you enjoy to return to your normal life.
- Connect with others, but keep in mind that social distancing (staying 6 feet from others) is important for preventing spread of COVID-19. If you are in Quarantine or Isolation, make sure you share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member via telephone, skype, text message or email. Maintain healthy relationships.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking.

Some other resources include:

If you are a resident who is 60 or older please contact Social Worker Danika Castle in the Council on Aging at 781-275-6825.

If you are a resident under the age of 60 you can contact Social Worker Christopher Bang in the Youth and Family Services Department at 781-918-4328.

Any Bedford resident seeking mental health counseling or therapy services can contact one of the Social Workers or reach out to Eliot Community Human Services directly at 978-369-1113.

Domestic Violence Services Network, Inc. (DVSNI) is continuing to follow up on domestic violence referrals and requests for service on a daily basis and provides community advocacy and safety planning for anyone who calls in or is referred for help and support by law enforcement partners. During the COVID-19 pandemic, DVSNI clients need support more than ever and DVSNI shall continue to provide CONFIDENTIAL support, advocacy, and resources via telephone to the extent possible. For help and support, PLEASE CALL DVSNI's Help Line - 888-399-6111.

Advocates Psychiatric Emergency Service team is always available to offer skilled, compassionate support and connections to resources and services during difficult times. **If you are experiencing a mental health or emotional crisis, please call (800) 640-5432 to speak to an Advocates crisis clinician. They are available to help 24 hours a day, every day.**