



TOWN OF BEDFORD
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BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS 01730

Bedford Public Schools Update on COVID-19

May 24, 2020

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The Bedford COVID-19 Task Force met May 24, 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 24, 2020, there have been a total of one hundred ninety (190) 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-seven (37) 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 which 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.

Fifty-three (53) 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.

Parks, Fields and Courts Open Monday, May 25, 2020 (Playgrounds/Play structures Still Closed)

Massachusetts has begun the process of reopening, and has relaxed the stay-at-home advisory. During the first phase of the state's reopening plan, a variety of businesses and industries will start to reopen with limitations and certain restrictions in place.

Now, a new safer-at-home advisory is in place which still suggests only leaving home for work, grocery shopping, health care, religious and outdoor activities.

Beginning tomorrow, the second part of the state's Phase 1 portion of the reopening plan will go into effect. In Bedford, this means that tennis courts, fields, and parks will be open with restrictions. The Town will post signage in these areas to ensure all have an understanding of these restrictions which are consistent with the Governor's 4-phase reopening plan.

In short, in all of these outdoor spaces social distancing and wearing face coverings still applies when you can't keep 6 feet away from others. It is strongly encouraged that you wear a face covering when in these areas but, at the very least, be prepared with a face covering in case you need it.

Tennis and pickle ball courts will reopen and, again, people must keep social distance or wear masks when they are unable to comply with social distancing; only people from the same household are allowed on the court at one time for singles and doubles play; those waiting to play should wait outside the court's gate and until previous players leave the court.

Although the courts and fields will be reopened, there can be no organized games, practices, or fitness classes/boot camps at this time. The restrictions of gatherings of more than 10 people remains in place.

Case Monitoring and Contact Tracing

The Bedford Board of Health has consistently worked to identify, communicate with and conduct contact traces, as appropriate, on COVID-19 positive cases who are Bedford residents, living in Bedford, while the Bedford VA is conducting follow-up and contact tracing of the Veterans 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>

There are some factors attributing to additional positive cases included in Bedford's total case number that is reported weekly by the state. These factors include: staff testing at long term care facilities where those staff attributed their "location" to Bedford, when in fact they have residency in another community, and former residents who have identified their "home" as Bedford but actually live in and are being followed in another community/state. The attribution of a facility's staff as being residents of a community, as is the case with Bedford, indeed skews the data and the surveillance work of the Board of Health. Rest assured that our Board of Health staff are working diligently to ensure not only our residents but staff and former Bedford residents who are attributed to Bedford are identified and followed by the appropriate community.

To that end, the Board of Health asks Bedford Residents to be part of the COVID-19 solution and "Answer the Call!" If you've tested positive for COVID- 19 or if you've been in close contact with someone who has tested

positive, a representative of the COVID Community Team, including the Bedford Community Health Nurse, the School Nurses and representatives from the MA Community Tracing Collaborative will be reaching out via phone to you and your close contacts to slow the spread. We'll help support you and will help to keep track of symptoms to move you through isolation and quarantine appropriately. Your name will not be publically released but the information you can provide to us is imperative in slowing the spread so we can get to the other side of this outbreak.

May is Mental Health Month

As we start to close out the month with some positive prospects - a beautiful holiday weekend and the beginnings of Phased openings of additional businesses with guidelines for COVID-19 prevention and control, the Bedford Health and Human Services Department wants remind folks that still it's ok to not feel ok. It's important to be aware of and care for our mental health at all times but especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. From loneliness and situational depression resulting from isolation, anxiety from the fear of the illness, grief from losses, to worrying about economic security, these stresses are significant and can affect our mental well-being and that of our loved ones. Nearly half of Americans report that the coronavirus has had a negative impact on their mental health – as reported in an issue paper reported by the Kaiser Family Foundation in April.

If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others, CALL2Talk is a resource available through the 2-1-1 line. In March, Governor Baker's Administration launched the Massachusetts Network of Care, a searchable behavioral health directory of services and organizations dedicated to helping preserve and protect your mental health.

This website connects Massachusetts residents with information in multiple languages on behavioral health services and treatment in their communities – including more than 5,000 organizations – searchable by keywords and zip codes.

Our colleagues at William James College have generated some Mental Health and Wellness tips during quarantine. We invite you to view them here: <https://interface.williamjames.edu/guide/mental-health-wellness-tips-qua...> They have also provided our community with free educational and informational resources and support groups. Please navigate to their webpage for virtual event dates and times. <https://www.williamjames.edu/community/resource-hub/public-events-calend...>

As has been the case since last year when they came on board, our Bedford Social Workers are available to help navigate residents through difficult situations. 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.

Outpatient Therapy is current available via tele-health. Bedford residents are not required to pay a co-pay and lack of insurance is not a barrier to services. 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.

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.

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're 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.

Symptoms of COVID-19 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, 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

Contact your health care provider if you exhibit any of the above mentioned symptoms and to discuss the need for testing. Close contacts of confirmed cases are the people most likely to become infected themselves. Close contacts, regardless of symptoms associated with COVID-19, should be tested as soon as possible after they are notified of their exposure to COVID-19.

You can use the following link, provided by the MA Department of Public Health, to find a convenient testing site <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-testing#testing-sites>.