



## TOWN OF BEDFORD

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BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS 01730

### Town of Bedford Update on COVID-19

**March 12, 2020**

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The Bedford COVID-19 Task Force met Thursday 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*

The Governor has declared a State of Emergency in Massachusetts due to COVID-19.

#### Active Case

Since the last Town update on March 11, 2020, there have been no further notifications from the Department of Public Health of COVID-19 cases in Bedford. The Town will continue to notify residents as we receive presumptive positive cases from the Department of Public Health. As of today, March 12, 2020, there are two presumptive positive cases.

#### School Closing Update-March 12, 2020

- As we await further guidance from State health officials, area superintendents have collaborated to make a timely and unified decision about school closure. The following districts have agreed to a two-week school closure beginning tomorrow, March 13, 2020: Arlington, Bedford, Belmont, Burlington, Lexington, Newton, and Winchester, while other districts in our area are working out the details with their teams.
- Our decision has been informed by our local boards of health, as well by expert epidemiologists who recognize that the time to act is now. We know we can have a greater and more positive impact on public health and safety if we do this together.
- Many in our area have been particularly impacted due to our families who have a greater number of presumptive positive cases in the area. Please be aware that this school closure period may be extended or shortened should State authorities so direct. We realize the decisions we are making in our geographic region do not necessarily reflect the needs and decisions of our counterparts in other areas of the State.
- We do this out of an abundance of caution, particularly out of sensitivity to families and staff who have underlying conditions that make them more vulnerable to complications should they become infected.

We also do not do this lightly, as we know that this will impose a hardship on families who do not have childcare options.

- More specific detail on this plan from the School Department will follow.

#### Town Update- March 12, 2020

The Town has put the following measures in place:

- Effective Monday, March 16, 2020, Town departments will be operating with reduced staffing until further notice.
- The Town Manager's office, Board of Health, Police, Fire, and Facilities will remain fully staffed during this time.
- Town departments with reduced in-person staffing will be the following: Code Enforcement, Department of Public Works, Finance, Town Clerk, and Town Manager.
- Assessors, Council on Aging and Youth and Family services will not be physically opened to the public, but available via phone or e-mail. The Veterans District Office will remain open on a limited schedule.
- All other departments, Library, Planning, and Recreation, will remain closed until further notice. If further information comes forward from the Commonwealth regarding public buildings, we will notify residents and adjust accordingly.
- **The Town strongly encourages the public to limit physical visits to the aforementioned departments if not critical.**
- Following the lead of the Bedford Public Schools, Kids Club, and all youth Recreation programs, will be postponed for two weeks effective Monday, March 16, 2020. Future decisions will align with the Bedford Public School closing procedures. All adult Recreation Department sponsored programs are cancelled indefinitely.
- Effective immediately, the Council on Aging, and the Bedford Free Public Library, are closed until further notice. The Bedford Local Transit (BLT) will still be in operation until further notice.
- All scheduled events, programs, and building rentals, at Old Town Hall, Town Center, and Town Hall are cancelled indefinitely. This plan excludes the Bedford Food Pantry, which The Town is working to re-open using Health and Human Services staff.

#### Previous Town/School Decisions- Prior to March 12, 2020

- **As of today, March 12, 2020, the municipal election is still on. Legally, municipal elections can only be postponed with a court order, legislative action, or by declaration of the Secretary of State. The Town has reached out to the local legislative delegation and the Secretary of State, and we await further guidance.**
- In advance of the municipal election, Saturday, March 14, procedures and protocols have been put in place to ensure the safety of voters, and election officials. The municipal election is not considered a large gathering. Town Facilities Department staff will be on site at John Glenn Middle School to provide hourly cleaning, public safety officials will ensure no more than fifty people are in the gymnasium at one time, and a new space layout and social distancing will be implemented for voters while standing in line, voting, etc. Election officials will be provided with personal protective equipment (gloves, sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes). Voting machines and booths will be cleaned, as will voting booths, throughout the day.
- Town officials have been in contact with the Secretary of State's office, and await guidance on our upcoming election. As of today, March 11, 2020, the Secretary of State has requested emergency election powers from the State legislature. The emergency authority being sought by Secretary of State William Galvin would include the power to postpone an election, or move a polling location in the case of an emergency. Bedford is one of the first municipalities in Massachusetts to hold a municipal election following Governor Baker's state of emergency declaration on March 10, 2020. Secretary Galvin's office, for now, is giving the same advice to town clerks as he did before Super Tuesday, including a

reminder to make sure towns have enough poll workers in case some get sick, to wipe down voting booth surfaces and to encourage voters to bring their own pens, if desired.

- **Annual Town Meeting, March 23, 2020, has been postponed.** The Selectmen, Town Moderator, and Town Officials (Town Manager, Superintendent of Schools, Health and Human Services Director, Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Facilities Director) met at 6:00 PM on March 11, 2020 to discuss COVID-19, and announce declarations related to the steps to mitigate town-wide impact. Per Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 39 Section 10A, Town Meeting, by decree of the Town Moderator, after consultation from Town Officials for up to 30 days to date and time certain for purposes of extreme weather, or public safety. Per the March 11, 2020 declaration, Town Meeting has been postponed until April 6, 2020 at 7:00 PM in the Bedford High School Auditorium. If necessary, an additional extension may be sought.
- After consultation with Town Counsel, the format of Open Town Meeting would be incredibly challenging to manage under the guidelines of social distancing, without limiting the involvement of all residents who wish attend. After evaluating potential mitigations to allow for holding the meeting, including, but not limited to, live-streaming over several rooms throughout Bedford High School to allow for social distancing, it was determined that the safest action is to postpone until a future date. Additionally, DPH guidelines urge older adults, and those with health issues, to avoid large crowds and large events, and thus, Town Officials did not want to limit participation from residents who fall under that category. As the public health ramifications of COVID-19 are evolving, the Town will reevaluate the need for further delay over the next several weeks.
- The Town urges reasonable caution and strongly urges all residents practice good hygiene, especially as it relates to hand-washing and covering coughs/sneezes.
- The Town has stated and continues to advise that those — including municipal employees, residents, or students — who are feeling sick with fever or flu symptoms should stay home, self-quarantine, and not report to work or school.

All local actions are being undertaken in accordance with the latest guidelines from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Although the risk to Massachusetts residents of the COVID-19 is generally low, the risk for influenza is currently high. Many of the things you do to help prevent colds and the flu can help protect you against other respiratory viruses:

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean things that are frequently touched (like doorknobs and countertops) with household cleaning spray or wipes.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands.
- Stay home if you are sick and avoid close contact with others.

The best source of guidance and recommendations is the DPH website:

[www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus](http://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus)

You can also visit:

<https://www.bedfordma.gov/bedford-board-of-health/pages/covid-19-coronavirus>

Town and School officials, and the Bedford Health Department, remain in continuous communication about this issue, and further updates will be provided to the community as we receive them.