Information for Local Officials

On March 10, 2020, Governor Baker declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts, which gives the state more flexibility in how it responds to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of his order, he announced restrictions for Executive Branch employees including out of state travel, canceling conferences and discretionary meetings, reminding employees who are ill not to come into work and encouraging high-risk employees to discuss alternative work arrangements with their supervisors. He further recommended that employers and other large organizations follow the state example and limit or eliminate non-essential travel, limit or eliminate large events where possible, and explore telework where appropriate for their organization.

At the town level, we need to consider our own meetings and large gatherings. On March 10, Governor Baker issued an emergency order allowing towns to hold public meetings virtually, except for special and annual town meetings. For more information, go to https://www.mass.gov/doc/open-meeting-law-order-march-12-2020/download. That emergency order also prohibits gatherings of 250 people or more, though again, town meetings are exempt.

For events where fewer than 250 people are expected, guidance from the Governor is to try to allow each person to have a distance of at least six feet from another person. Analyze the size of the room in which you plan to hold the event and how many people you expect to attend to determine whether people will have that much space between them.

These measures are what we call “social distancing;” trying to keep people from congregating in close quarters. Below is a graphic showing how proactive measures such as social distancing can slow the spread of disease and reduce the burden on our healthcare system. Our hospitals are at or near capacity every day; a pandemic illness like COVID-19 immensely stresses the system. With social distancing, we can help to “flatten the curve” of uncontrolled transmission.
Actions Residents Can Take

The Governor also urged older adults and those with health issues to avoid large crowds and large events. To that end, MAPHCO advises those over 60 years of age or those with compromised immune systems or underlying health issues to consider the following:

- limiting travel
- shopping off-hours
- avoid large gatherings such as concerts, parties, movie cinemas
- avoid congregant religious services, or sit at least six feet away from others, avoid Peace handshakes, avoid communion
- senior centers and community meals
- don’t shake hands or give hugs.

While the elderly and those with existing health issues are the most vulnerable to the effects of the Coronavirus, the rest of us can be carriers, so it may not be the best time to visit your friends and loved ones, even if you don’t think you’re sick. Hospitals and long-term care facilities are actively restricting visitation for that reason.

The CDC has issued guidance for the public to [Get Your Household Ready for COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfecting.html) and on how to clean and disinfect household surfaces.