The COVID-19 Emergency Continues to Rapidly Evolve Nationally and in the Commonwealth.

Please monitor the DPH COVID-19 webpage daily for up to date information, located at: https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19

Social Distancing – Maintain Physical Distance, and Promote Social Connectivity

COVID-19 symptoms can take many days to appear, but it’s very easy for an infected individual to spread the virus long before they’re feeling sick. Many people are spreading the virus while going about their daily lives as usual. Once coronavirus starts to spread in a community, about 20 percent of cases are severe and may require hospitalization. As those cases multiply, hospitals can quickly become overwhelmed, and people with severe cases of Covid-19 who can’t receive proper medical attention end up being at a much higher risk of dying.

The best way to slow down the spread is for everyone — healthy, sick, young, old — to limit social contact as much as possible - **immediately.** This is commonly known as social distancing, and it only works if enough of us do it. But if we do, it could mean the difference between the life and death of someone you know.
We must all work together in our region to flatten the curve of the spreading pandemic by slowing the spread of the disease to avoid a catastrophic failure of our hospitals and healthcare centers. And it needs to happen now.

The term “social distancing” refers to avoiding physical proximity, but bear in mind that in our digital age there are many ways to use technology to promote social connectivity even when maintaining greater physical distance from each other.

Read more at: https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/03/16/coronavirus-social-distancing-myths-realities-column/5053696002/?te=1&nl=debatable&emc=edit_db_20200317&campaign_id=134&instance_id=16858&segment_id=22329&user_id=472ac572b4ca9670bcaf015ea8a0cd37&regi_id=5214703920200317

Emergency Order Limiting Gatherings in the Commonwealth.
Governor Baker issued an emergency order limiting gatherings to 25 individuals and prohibiting on-premises consumption of food or drink at bars and restaurants, beginning on March 17 and effective until April 6.

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.

United States Now on a Level 2 Travel Alert
Last week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shifted the United States Travel Alert to a Level 2, indicating a need for enhanced precaution for high risk travelers for all interstate travel.
**NIH Study on Virus Life on Surfaces.**
The virus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is stable for several hours to days in aerosols and on surfaces, according to a new study from National Institutes of Health, CDC, UCLA and Princeton University scientists in The New England Journal of Medicine.

**State Appropriates $15 Million in COVID-19 Response**
The Baker-Polito Administration has made money available to local municipalities 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. Municipalities that do not fit into either category will be aligned with a regional entity across the state, including several regional planning agencies.

**Mass 211 Information and Referral System and COVID-19**
Massachusetts 2-1-1 now provides real-time COVID-19 information, resources, and referrals in multiple languages. This expansion is the result of an increased investment in resources directed towards this 24-hour state-supported telephone hotline.

Through this partnership with Massachusetts 2-1-1, DPH subject matter experts are expanding access to information 24/7, and empowering call operators to provide the latest information about the status of COVID-19 response efforts in Massachusetts. At peak call times, DPH staff will augment the call team to ensure residents’ questions are answered without delay.

**COVID-19 Testing in the Commonwealth**
On March 13, DPH issued a guidance letter for testing of persons with suspect COVID-19 through the Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory. This new system will enable Massachusetts to more quickly and effectively test and report out test results. It means the SPHL and clinical/commercial labs will be able to report their test results electronically. This in turn will automatically make test results available to state epidemiologists, clinicians who have ordered the tests, and to local boards of health.
Isolation and Quarantine Briefing for Local Boards and Municipal Partners

Please note that the FRCOG webpage hosts a briefing regarding Massachusetts isolation and quarantine laws, procedures, and considerations. Built off the Local Public Health Institute of MA’s online training, the document is designed to be quickly digested by municipal partners who need to understand role clarity, while also providing links to necessary laws, regulations and documents for local health authorities. Please share it widely with your municipal partners.