

# New Orders From Mass. Gov. Baker Aim To Attract Staff For COVID-19 Surge

By KATIE LANNAN / STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE • APR 9, 2020

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*Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker said the COVID-19 surge in the state is on track to land somewhere between April 10 and April 20.*

SAM DORAN / STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

A trio of executive orders signed Thursday by Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker aims to expand the health care system's capacity and ensure access to COVID-19 treatment, including in field hospitals.

The actions come almost one month into a state of emergency as the latest step preparing for a surge in infections and hospitalizations that could arrive as soon as Friday. At his daily press conference, Baker also discussed new details about a South Boston field hospital and the state's ongoing quest to obtain ventilators.

Baker said the state heard from the federal government last night that it will receive an additional 100 ventilators, and Boston Children's hospital is making a "wonderful donation" of five ventilators. So far, Massachusetts has received 100 ventilators of the 1,700 it's requested from the national stockpile.

"Obviously, we continue to be focused on the pursuit of ventilators through other means and other channels as well," he said.

At this point, Baker said, the COVID-19 surge is on track "to land about when we thought it was going to land" — somewhere between April 10 and April 20 — but he doesn't "have a crystal ball with respect to how long it's going to last or how high it's going to go."

As of Thursday afternoon, 503 people in Massachusetts had died from COVID-19, at least 1,747 had been hospitalized, and a total of 18,941 had tested positive for it.

"We're going to talk to our colleagues in the health care community," Baker said. "We're going to think about what life could be like once we get past this, but I will be incredibly careful about not permitting this insidious, awful and horribly dangerous and contagious virus from coming back anytime soon, and I think that's got to be the way we all look at this."

Baker said he knows economic consequences are severe — nearly 470,000 Massachusetts residents filed new unemployment claims over the last three weeks, he said — but the reason the state has ordered businesses to close, advised residents to stay at home and imposed other restrictions "is to keep people alive and to keep our health care system from getting so overwhelmed that it isn't able to do the things it can do for people."

Two of the orders Baker signed Thursday involve adding more providers to the available health care workforce.

One will allow [nursing school graduates](#) and final-semester students to practice, under direct supervision, before they receive their license.

Another makes graduates of international medical schools eligible for licensure in Massachusetts if they have completed at least two years of postgraduate resident training in the U.S. Advocates and lawmakers have been pushing for the state to ease licensing requirements for foreign-trained doctors.

Eva Millona, executive director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, called the move an "excellent first step" and "great news for international medical graduates who are well into their residencies" but said many foreign-trained medical professionals in Massachusetts "don't fit that profile, even though they have very robust skills and experience."

Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders also announced a [new website](#) hosting job opportunities and applications for COVID-19 temporary care sites, including field hospitals and dedicated skilled nursing facilities. She said those "surge sites" are hiring for a variety of health care and human services roles, including respiratory therapists, nursing aides, and housekeepers.

Officials are "kicking off an all-out, statewide strategy" to recruit laid-off and furloughed health care workers, volunteers, students and others, Sudders said.

Baker's [third new order](#) mandates that health insurers cover all medically required costs of COVID-19 treatment, with no charge to the patient. He said the new field hospitals -- in Worcester at the DCU Center and at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center -- might be considered out-of-network facilities under normal circumstances.

Officials announced Thursday that Partners HealthCare will lead the clinical care at the BCEC site, now dubbed Boston Hope. The medical center will be a partnership with Boston Health Care for the Homeless, eventually providing 500 beds on the medical side and 500 for homeless populations.

Dr. Anne Klibanski, the Partners president and CEO, said Boston Hope will begin accepting patients Friday and will be open to patients from across the city and region, not just those from Partners hospitals.

"I think we should all be proud of this, how many have come together in such a short amount of time to make this happen. The clinicians, the support staff and so many others from across our system and across the regions, they're raising their hands and asking how they can take care of patients," she said. "Staffing has been a challenge, it has been an issue, but seeing the number of people who have come forward, seeing the creativity, seeing the willingness to serve is what is making us be able to move forward now."