

# State House: Coronavirus update in Massachusetts



Massachusetts State House

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BOSTON (SHNS) – Sunday marked a rarity in the COVID-19 era, with no formal updates from Governor Charlie Baker or the Trump administration. State public health officials in the afternoon reported another 169 deaths, raising the total to 2,899.

Another 1,590 new cases were also [reported by the Department of Public Health](#), down from the 2,379 new cases reported on Saturday, bringing the total count of COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts to just under 55,000.

During an [interview on WCVB Sunday](#), state Rep. Jon Santiago, an emergency room doctor at Boston Medical Center, said the arrivals of new patients visiting emergency rooms during the crisis has been “significantly slower” than presumed at the start of the outbreak. The patients who are receiving emergency care, he said, are older and “quite sick,” including some with chronic lung disease and others who are arriving a week after being diagnosed with COVID-19 and in need ventilators or intensive care.

Sunday’s DPH report estimated there are 1,077 COVID-19 patients currently being treated in intensive care units. Many of those people are at Massachusetts General Hospital (172), Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (105) or Brigham and Women’s Hospital (97).

There are nearly 3,900 people with COVID-19 currently hospitalized, with the average age of those patients pegged at 69.

More than half of the reported deaths, or 1,632, were people living in long-term care facilities, where residents and workers account for more than 10,000 of the cases confirmed to date.

State officials reported more than 236,000 COVID-19 tests conducted to date, including more than 9,200 tests newly reported since Saturday. The number of people being tested each day has risen significantly, but in a state of 6.9 million people, and given that many COVID-19 carriers do not show any symptoms, the calls are continuing for more widespread testing to inform the larger goal of isolating victims and tracing and notifying their contacts to slow the spread.

The city of Boston launched a study Sunday with MGH to test a random sample of 1,000 Bostonians from select neighborhoods for both the virus or antibodies to get a better sense of the virus's prevalence in the community.

U.S. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal of Springfield [said Saturday](#) that he expects another major federal aid package to emerge in the U.S. House "in the next 10 days."

On Sunday, Larry Hogan, the governor of Maryland and chairman of the National Governors Association, [told George Stephanopolous of ABC](#) that he believed Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell would regret saying that states could seek bankruptcy due to COVID-19 impacts and expressed optimism about the prospects for a "Phase 4" aid package. The NGA has advocated for a \$500 billion aid package for the states.

## **Gun Stores Protest On Cape:**

Gun rights activists staged a demonstration on Cape Cod on Saturday afternoon to protest Gov. Charlie Baker's refusal to include gun shops on the state's list of essential business that are allowed to stay open during the coronavirus pandemic. Dozens of activists, many wearing masks, gathered on the grass at the Bourne Bridge Rotary holding signs demanding that gun shops, as well as the broader economy, be allowed to reopen. Some protesters also held "Don't Tread On Me" posters and large signs for Jay McMahan, the Republican running in a special election for a state Senate seat that covers Plymouth and parts of the upper Cape. "Our liberal GOP Governor not only closed our gun stores state wide, he prohibited online firearms courses, and made firearm businesses ineligible for state small business loans. Even the Democratic Governor of Maine followed President Trump's guidelines and made Maine gun stores essential," said Adam Lange, the sponsor of the protest and the founder of United Cape Patriots. The gun group Massachusetts Gun Rights also participated. Some gun stores and activists have sued Baker in federal court over his decision to close gun shops during the pandemic. The governor's business closure executive order runs through May 4, but could be extended.

## **Boston Launching Antibody Study:**

Boston plans to begin testing for antibodies to the coronavirus among asymptomatic residents in select neighborhoods in the city to get a better understanding of the prevalence of the virus. City Hall announced a partnership on Sunday with Massachusetts General Hospital to test 1,000 volunteers this week for both COVID-19 and antibodies to the virus as part of a study to evaluate the true level of exposure in the city. Outreach to residents for testing began Sunday in East Boston, Roslindale and within the 02121 and 02125 zip codes in Dorchester. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that 25 percent or more of the infected population could show no symptoms of COVID-19, but remain a risk to transmit the disease to others. As of Wednesday, the state reported that Boston had 6,744 documented cases of COVID-19, a rate of 970.4 per 100,000 people. "It is our hope that by conducting this testing, we as a collective City will get a better understanding of the true prevalence of COVID-19 in our community," Mayor Marty Walsh said in a statement. "The more we can expand our testing, the more we can learn how to use our medical resources more efficiently, and how we need to focus our current efforts to contain the virus." Testing for COVID-19 is done with a nasal swab, while antibody testing is done with blood drawn from a finger prick to determine whether the body is responding to infection or has

previously fought off the virus. Testing for residents contacted to be a part of the study will be free and on a first-come-first-serve basis.

## **Testing Among Boston's Homeless:**

One thousand COVID-19 tests donated by the company Orig3n will help the City of Boston test all clients in its shelter system over the next two weeks, Mayor Martin Walsh announced Friday night. "This is a big step forward in protecting our most vulnerable populations," Walsh said. "Universal testing in Boston's homeless community is critical to allow us to provide individuals the targeted care they need." The effort is being executed with Boston Health Care for the Homeless, the Boston Public Health Commission, St. Francis House, and the Pine Street Inn. Through Thursday, 1,340 individuals have been tested and 453, or 34 percent, have tested positive. Orig3n received emergency use authorization April 10 from the FDA for its COVID-19 test, which has a turnaround time of 24-36 hours after receipt of specimens at the the company's Boston lab. On Saturday, the city reported a total of 7,910 confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 271 deaths and 1,573 people having recovered.

## **Boston Restaurant Option: Sell Groceries:**

In a move intended to improve access to food during the pandemic, the City of Boston heading into the weekend issued new [temporary policy and guidance](#) to allow permitted restaurants to sell grocery items by delivery, curbside pickup and takeout. The move by Mayor Martin Walsh waives the required retail food permit for the sale of uncooked foods. "By allowing restaurants to also sell grocery and other essential items, we can help address social distancing concerns in grocery stores while supporting restaurants and food businesses during these unprecedented times," Walsh said in a statement late Friday. In addition to following procedures outline by the city's Inspectional Services Department, participating restaurants must also submit an operational plan to the Boston Licensing Board, which must grant its approval before restaurants may sell grocery items. Democratic political consultant Maryanne Marsh said Somerville and some Cape Cod communities are also allowing restaurants to sell grocery products, and said that policy should be adopted statewide. "It would help the restaurants, it would help people get food safely, and not tax the grocery stores the way they are now," Marsh said during an appearance Sunday on WCVB's "On the Record." The option, Marsh added, could also offset additional losses restaurants likely face if they reopen with less seating capacity.

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