

CORONAVIRUS / COVID-19 UPDATE #1

Friday, March 6, 2020

You know how much I care about transparency, so I'm going to give it to you straight about COVID-19, the novel coronavirus circulating the globe. This information reflects what I learned as I questioned state authorities and medical and public health experts about the virus during Wednesday's [Public Health Committee COVID-19 Oversight Hearing](#), as well as other reliable sources.

As you may already know, COVID-19 is here, but there is no need to panic. As of this writing, there are at least eight (8) confirmed or presumed positive cases in Massachusetts, including one in Wellesley. In all likelihood, COVID-19 will continue to spread. There is no vaccine or cure, though experts suggest we might have some kind of treatment medication before we have a viable vaccine. Most people who get COVID-19 will not require intensive medical treatment and should be able to recover at home. Again, we should not panic, but we should take precautions.

The critical thing to do now is to slow the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the number of new cases so that providers and treatment are available for high-risk individuals if they contract the virus.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

- **Wash your hands, often, with soap and warm water, for at least 20 seconds.** Experts do not yet know whether sanitizer is equally or less effective than soap and water, so if you have access to soap and water, choose actual washing over sanitizer. To get to 20 seconds, I've told my kids to sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" at least 3 times (but they sing pretty fast... twice through works for me, and there are [plenty of other more grown-up options](#)). My family and I also started washing our hands the moment we walk into our home.
- **Cough and sneeze into your elbow** or a tissue. Throw out the tissue immediately.
- Try to **avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.** (I know, it's hard.)
- **Use a knuckle, an elbow, a hip, or a foot** to open doors, push elevator buttons, and maneuver obstacles in public places. Don't use your open hand if you can avoid it.
- **Stay home if you are sick.**
- **Clean frequently touched objects and surfaces**, such as door knobs, staircase banisters, tables, and countertops. A regular household cleaner will work. Don't forget to clean your mobile phone cases, laptops, tablets, and other devices. (These are some of the dirtiest things around!)
- **Get a flu shot.** This is important because flu symptoms and COVID-19 symptoms look the same. If you get a flu shot, it's a lot easier for doctors to figure out if you've actually got COVID-19, or if you've got the flu or a bad cold.
- I know it's awkward, but **don't shake hands** with folks you meet in public. Use a fist bump instead, or if you're feeling it, try an [elbow-bump](#).

- **Check the travel advisories.** State officials have recommended that organized international group trips be canceled, but domestic travel has not been restricted.
- **If you just returned from an area with an active outbreak** (currently China, Italy, Iran, South Korea, and Japan), please check the guidance about self-quarantine available at [mass.gov/covid19](https://www.mass.gov/covid19) and contact your local board of health or the Massachusetts Department of Public Health if you truly think you might have been exposed.
- **If you reasonably believe you might have COVID-19 but are otherwise a healthy person, call your doctor to discuss your symptoms.** Common symptoms include fever, exhaustion, and a dry cough. Symptoms are often mild and most people recover without needing any special treatment or medical attention.
- Roughly 1 in 6 people who contract COVID-19 develop more serious symptoms, such as difficulty breathing. Seniors and people with underlying health problems are at increased risk. **If you or a loved one have difficulty breathing, seek medical attention immediately.**
- Remember that COVID-19 transmission and contraction has absolutely nothing to do with a person's race, ethnicity, or national origin. **Please reject racial stereotypes, misinformation, and conspiracy theories** about the spread of this virus. This is a time for us to come together, not tear our communities apart.

WHAT YOU DON'T NEED TO DO:

- Stockpile bottled water, unless you regularly require bottled water.
- Wear a face mask, unless you are actively sick.
- Skip fun things. (Please have fun!)
- Run to the doctor or the hospital if you have a regular old (annoying) cold -- this is actually one of the worst things you can do. None of us need an unnecessary rush on our medical system. There will be people who experience serious symptoms and they are the ones that need hospital care, in addition to the individuals already in the hospital.

WHAT YOU MIGHT CONSIDER DOING:

- Purchase extra supplies, such as soap, tissues, cleaners, over-the-counter medications, and non-perishable food items.
- See if you can get an extra dispensation of prescription medications.
- Make a donation to your local food pantry. Many of us are fortunate enough to be able to purchase additional supplies as needed. Plenty of people in our communities across the Commonwealth can't do that. There is a real equity component to this problem.

For parents and caregivers of children: I had a frank conversation with my children about COVID-19. I answered their questions calmly and directly, and I instructed them to always come back and ask me any other questions they might have. Other children at their schools are spreading misinformation, so it is important to talk to your kids about COVID-19, convey the real facts, avoid worrying them unnecessarily, and combat misinformation they might hear. Here are [two resources](#) you might review before having this conversation with your children.

I will provide additional updates as the situation continues to develop.