Massachusetts Department of Public Health to alter how it reports COVID-19 cases

Starting today Massachusetts officials will change how they list COVID-19 hospitalizations in state data. Officials will now discern between those people who entered the hospital because of COVID or for some other reason even though they tested positive after admittance. In other words, whether admissions are primary or incidental to COVID-19.

The state Department of Public Health stated that this distinction will be important because it will give health officials a sense of the severity of the Omicron variant and how the record high numbers of new cases correlate to illness severe enough to require hospitalization.

Hospitalizations for those infected with the virus have spiked over the last month as the Omicron variant has become dominant due to its more infectious nature. This surge is on par with the peak of the December 2020/January 2021 surge. Prior to this spike there had never been more than 10,000 new cases a day, now there are more than 20,000 new COVID cases daily, likely due in part to public gathering for the holidays.

Massachusetts Gov. Baker has been mulling over making the statistical distinction between those who test positive after being admitted and those with COVID cases severe enough that they head to the hospital for almost a year now. In October 2020 he said: “When you call the hospitals and you talk to them one at a time, or the systems, a significant number of the people who we count as COVID positive are not in the hospital because they have COVID. They’re in the hospital for some other purpose and they got tested positive when they came in.”

Critics say that Massachusetts is infamous for its snail-like pace when it comes to getting through bureaucratic tape and this distinction should have been made when the Governor made it.

Currently 93% of the state’s medical or surgical hospital beds and 86% of intensive care unit beds are occupied.