

Gov. Baker, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Explore Medical Capacity Expansion

By Colin A. Young
State House News Service

Gov. Charlie Baker and Boston Mayor Martin Walsh had “very productive” conversations Saturday with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers around identifying, retrofitting and using college dorms, closed nursing homes and other facilities as extra medical treatment capacity as the coronavirus pandemic continues.

Though the state has already taken drastic steps to slow the spread of the highly contagious coronavirus by limiting social interaction, the government and the health care sector are working to ensure that hospitals and clinics will be able to handle the surge of COVID-19 patients that is expected to accompany a significant increase in testing for the respiratory illness.

The governor said Saturday afternoon that the state’s Coronavirus Command Center, helmed by Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, has been talking to hospitals to “scenario plan” for an influx of COVID-19 patients, and will now work to pick some sites in Massachusetts that the Army Corps might be able to convert. It would be a few weeks before the Corps would have any such site ready, he said.

“We got a sense for the kind of work that they can do here in the commonwealth and identified – along with several other folks, including people from the private sector – facilities that could possibly be either converted or modified to provide additional medical care capacity as we ramp up to deal with

this virus,” Baker said from the State House. He added, “The command center is also working closely with the hospital community on the plans that they’re pursuing to develop additional capacity within their four walls.”

The governor said some colleges have already expressed a willingness to make dorms available for medical use. The biggest issues, he said, are ensuring that the sites have adequate electricity and water supplies for medical operations. Baker said the Army Corps on Saturday essentially gave the state a “cookbook” that it can use to select sites it wants the Corps to inspect physically.

“This is obviously a mission that our National Guard could assist with as well,” he said. The governor recently activated the Guard to help with “logistical support and other assistance” in the state’s coronavirus response.

The governor gave an update Saturday on the capacity for testing at the state’s public health lab and commercial labs that have been granted approval to conduct testing for the coronavirus.

Between Wednesday and Friday, the governor said, capacity at all labs increased roughly 65 percent, from just under 700 tests on Wednesday to 1,144 on Friday, Baker said. The number of tests actually conducted nearly doubled from 520 tests conducted Wednesday to 962 tests performed Friday, he said.

“And I can tell you based on my own personal discussions with the commercial lab community, their capacity to test is going to continue to grow in significant ways over the course of the next several weeks,” Baker said. “I want to remind folks that as the testing numbers go up and the criteria by which you can be tested expands, we certainly expect that we’ll see an increase in the number of positive test cases as well.”

The state’s first large-scale, drive-through testing facility opened Thursday at a CVS in Shrewsbury, and Baker said

Saturday that AFC Urgent Care Waltham had begun to test pre-screened patients. Those types of partnerships, he said, “will play an important role in our overall effort to expand testing capacity across Massachusetts.”

By the beginning of the coming week, Baker and Sudders have said, the state’s public health lab and commercial labs must get a to a point at which they can conduct a minimum of 3,500 tests each day.

“The issue here is to get testing to the point we talked about earlier in the week, where we’re doing what we would think of as the same level of testing that you see every single day in other countries where the combination of testing and chasing – testing, isolation, tracing – that’s where we need to get to,” Baker said Saturday. “And in most of those countries, the way they bent the curve was they bent the curve by testing enough fast enough to be able to catch up to the growth in new cases, and then doing the tracing work and isolating everybody. And that’s where we got to get.”

New testing numbers released Saturday afternoon by the Department of Public Health showed that 5,277 COVID-19 tests have been performed in Massachusetts – 3,031 by the state public health lab and 2,246 by commercial and other labs – since Feb. 28.

For health care providers, grocery store employees and other essential workers, the governor said Saturday that the state has more than 300 locations ready to provide emergency child care beginning Monday, when all other early education centers and family child care providers must close under an executive order issued by the governor Wednesday.

“We know that child care is an especially critical piece of emergency service and that it allows our frontline workers to continue their battle against COVID-19 and to continue their work. And there are times when our families are on the front

lines and don't have another option for their children," Baker said. He added, "We expect more to come online eventually, but this needs to be implemented safely and the sites should only really be used as a last resort."

More details on the sites will be provided via the state's Department of Early Education and Care website Sunday morning, he said.

Sudders responded during Saturday afternoon's press conference to the news, announced by Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts, that an inmate at the Massachusetts Treatment Center had tested positive of COVID-19. A notice posted on the DOC's website said inmate visits by family and friends have been suspended at the state's 16 correctional facilities.

"The Department of Correction has followed all the protocols around isolating the individual, doing the contact tracing – the people who individuals come in contact with – of those individuals, if they were staff went home and are being tested. [The] place was disinfected," she said. "So we believe that the treatment center followed all the protocols that we do in any other facility where you would have a patient, a person, or in this case an inmate, who was tested positive."

Massachusetts Public Health reports state's second death from COVID-19

A woman in her 50s from Middlesex County is the second person in Massachusetts to die from COVID-19 related illness, the Department of Public Health announced today. She had a pre-

existing condition predisposing her to more severe disease. Details on the first death can be found **here**.

As of today, more than 5,200 residents of Massachusetts have been tested for COVID-19 by the State Public Health Laboratory and commercial labs. Of those, 525 people have tested positive. New Bedford's first case can be found **here**.

Yesterday, DPH announced that a man in his 80s from Suffolk County was the first person in Massachusetts to die from COVID-19 related illness. The man had been hospitalized and had pre-existing health conditions that put him at higher risk for COVID-19.

COVID-19 activity is increasing in Massachusetts. At this time, if people are only mildly symptomatic, they should speak to their healthcare provider about whether they need to be assessed in person. If not, they should stay at home while they are sick. Asymptomatic family members should practice social distancing and immediately self-isolate if they develop symptoms.

In the United States, there have been more than 15,219 of COVID-19 and more than 200 deaths, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Massachusetts and nationwide, the public is being asked to avoid crowds, stay 6 feet away from others, not shake hands or hug, and call/Facetime and online chat with friends and loved ones rather than meet face to face.

More information about COVID-19 can be found at www.mass.gov/covid19.

Fall River reports first case of COVID-19

The City of Fall River was informed that a resident has tested positive for COVID-19. The resident is now isolated. Those potentially exposed to the diagnosed resident have been traced and contacted. Those individuals are now in quarantine.

Resources for COVID-19 Information:

Behavioral Health: It is important that residents prioritize their mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak. Residents experiencing anxiety, depression, or need emotional support can call 211 to be connected to behavioral health resources.

Massachusetts 2-1-1 provides residents with real time COVID-19 information. Residents with questions regarding COVID-19 should call 2-1-1.

- MA 2-1-1 is available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week
- Information is available in over 150 languages
- All calls are confidential

Mayor Mitchell: New Bedford has first case of Coronavirus

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From Mayor Jon Mitchell:

“New Bedford now has its first presumptive positive test for

Coronavirus, and the individual is now self-quarantining and we hope for a speedy recovery. Although this was not unexpected and will be the first of more to come, it is a reminder that appropriate social distancing and personal hygiene should be strictly observed.

I also remind residents to follow guidance by the City, state, and federal governments. Avoid group gatherings, and remember that restaurants are takeout and delivery only. On Monday, March 23, personal care businesses such as hairdressers and barbers, massage services, and nail salons will also close in New Bedford, given the close person-to-person proximity in these services.

This guidance is for the health and well-being of all residents and workers in the City. I urge you to take this guidance seriously and protect your health and the health of your family, friends and neighbors. Check our COVID-19 page at www.newbedford-ma.gov for regular updates.”

Yesterday, Mitchell announced **effective Monday that personal care businesses including salons must close.**

New Bedford personal care businesses including salons must close Monday, March 23

Five ways you can make a positive difference during

the coronavirus scare

Massachusetts has declared a state of emergency due to the spread of the coronavirus across the country and the commonwealth. There is no doubt that we are in troubled times – people are being laid off, businesses are either closing their doors or limiting their operations and different levels of panic is setting in for many. Here are five things you can do to make a positive impact during the coronavirus scare:

1. Check-in on your neighbors

I have a saying, we are defined by what we do for others. At this moment, there are vulnerable people on your street and neighborhood that could use your help. Do you know someone that is elderly, with health issues or simply could use a hand? Reach out to them. Shopping for an elderly or sick neighbor could literally save a life. If you do shop, use good sanitation principles – wash your hands and even washing the grocery items as the conveyor belt and debit/credit card reader can be home to germs.

2. Buy gift cards

Businesses are struggling and many will not come back from this coronavirus scare. If you have disposable income, call or visit your favorite restaurant or small business's website and purchase a gift card. Like some of us who live paycheck-to-paycheck, some businesses are surviving month-to-month. While government relief may be on the way soon, the best way to ensure your favorite local restaurant/business survives is to support them today.

3. Don't hoard

I know this part will go on deaf ears, but for the love of God, stop the hoarding! The last few grocery trips I went on showed the results of panic. I saw empty shelves labeled for

water, paper towels, toilet paper, spaghetti, pasta sauce, and other items.

The water is the dangerous part as some people live in towns with semi-toxic water. For example, Swansea and Norton are known to have terrible water in some areas – the tap literally produces brown water or known carcinogens. If you have clean water in your city/town and hoarding water, you are dangerously impacting other people's health. And what is up with hoarding toilet paper? Seriously??? If you are stocking your grocery cart with toilet paper and ignoring food, you won't survive too long in a real crisis.



4. Spend time with the kids

Schools in Massachusetts are closed for several weeks at a minimum. Take advantage of it and set some family time. One of my favorite TV shows is 'This is Us' – important takeaways from that show are life is precious, kids grow up quickly and today could be your or a loved one's last day. While being locked up at home with the kids can be a nightmare for some, consider at least an hour a day of family time.

5. Stop spreading hate and misinformation on social media

For the good or bad, social media has changed the way we communicate. The worst part of social media is the hate and misinformation that seems to thrive. During this coronavirus crisis, do the world a favor and only post accurate information by double-checking your information. Spreading misinformation can be dangerous. I've seen posts that Dunkin' was closing down during the crisis. Not true.

Finally, now is not the time to play the blame game – let's take a deep breath, come together like we did after 9/11, and then after the crisis is over figure out what we did wrong so we can be better prepared for the future.

What are you doing to be a positive influence during this coronavirus scare? Post a comment!

Local woman stranded in Cabo Verde for days because of Coronavirus concerns

"Many people have told me to reach out to you about this matter. Two of my friends and I have been in Cabo Verde (an

island of the West Coast of Africa) for 2 weeks now.

After Trump spoke about closing the border with European countries we started to panic because our flight had an hour and a half layover in Portugal. Our flight was with SATA Azores Airlines. To reassure our flight would be okay we spoke to their agency out here in Praia, Cape Verde.

The woman at the agency reassured us that our flight will be fine and would not be getting canceled. So our stress and nerves calmed down because we thought we would be heading home on March 16th. Once March 16th arrived we headed to the airport around 9:00am, our flight was at 12:50 pm. We see hundreds of people waiting in lines with their luggage.

From overhearing people talking the word was that all flights got canceled until March 31st. We did not get an email, a text, an alert on their app...NOTHING. There were no workers walking around explaining what was happening and instead it was hundreds of people confused and worried.

There was one person at the SATA desk at the Praia airport for hundreds of people who just figured out their flight was canceled once they arrived at the airport from workers who help travelers with their luggage. After waiting 2-3 hours at the airport we decided to head to the SATA agency which was awful.

THEY DIDN'T HELP US AT ALL.

They said no refunds and they refused to help us look for other flights available, the women working kept smiling as if she took us as a joke. We were getting nowhere at the agency so we decided to head to the US Embassy out here and they were just as useless.

We had to wait 2 hours because they were on a lunch break and we searched for them for about 20 minutes just for them to tell us they can't do anything to help us. They said we need

to look into flights and tell family to send money. We then, by ourselves, secured our tickets with Cabo Verde Airlines who was doing a direct flight to Boston early Saturday morning on March 21st.

They guaranteed our flight home. Come Thursday, March 18th, I got a call from my hotel that another airline called TAP would be canceling all their flights after today and other airlines may be doing the same... still no email or alert from SATA or Cabo Verde airline.

We rushed to the airport to stand in line for 3-4 hours to find out Cape Verde closed their borders but the Prime Minister stated U.S Citizens can fly home. As we are at the airport I get an email from the U.S Embassy to go directly to the SATA agency because there is word there will be a direct flight to Boston tonight.

We followed the Embassy's directions and headed to the agency. The woman who gave us a hard time before was there and reassured us that there will definitely be a flight tonight directing to Boston for U.S Citizens but the time was still unsure.

We packed all our stuff and headed to the airport for hours just for them to tell us there was no flight. They said our flight will be Friday, March 20 at 2:45 pm. This morning we called and now they are saying Boston won't approve them to land. Cape Verde is not a European country and has NO cases of Coronavirus. We don't know what else to do.

We just want to be home with our family. I made a Facebook live last night explaining all of this. Please help us get the word out! We need prayers!

Thank you,
Brianna Tavares"

Governor Baker eyes 3,500 coronavirus tests per day in Massachusetts by next week

Colin A. Young

State House News Service

Since testing for the highly-contagious coronavirus began in Massachusetts three weeks ago, the state and local labs have conducted about 2,280 tests. But by the beginning of next week, the governor and state officials are hoping to conduct 3,500 tests each and every day.

Baker, Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito and Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders toured Quest Diagnostics in Marlborough on Thursday morning as the lab ramps up to be able to test 20,000 people per day across the country. CEO Steve Rusckowski said the company hopes to eventually be able to test 2,000 to 3,000 samples per day from Massachusetts patients.

“We believe that over the course of the next several days and weeks there will be an enormous increase in the amount of testing that takes place on a daily basis here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,” Baker said. “[It] can’t happen fast enough but I do believe that with the pivots and the adjustments that are being made by organizations like Quest here in Marlborough and by many of our hospital partners and by the state lab and other organizations, we will get to the point where we’re doing the amount of testing every day that we believe that we need to be doing.”

Until last Thursday when Quest Diagnostics and LabCorp

received federal approval to begin testing for COVID-19 in Massachusetts, the state's public health lab was the only local testing option. Since then, Massachusetts has worked with hospitals, other private labs like Thermo Fisher and the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard to expand the state's capacity to test for the coronavirus and to implement drive-through testing sites.

Baker said Thursday that testing is key to the state's goal of spreading out the rise of infections in order to avoid a spike in cases that would overwhelm the health care system.

"I think the biggest problem we've got in dealing with all of this is getting far enough ahead to believe that we have the capacity to play a proactive game here," he said. "And a big part of the pivots the labs like Quest are making, the approval processes that we've been able to get out of the feds with respect to our own state lab and academic medical center labs here and places like the Broad are part of what we need to do."

The Department of Public Health reported Wednesday that the state lab had conducted 1,743 coronavirus tests as of 7:30 a.m. Wednesday. Of those, 224 were identified as positive cases of infection. As of 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, LabCorp conducted 306 tests resulting in 11 positive results, Quest Diagnostics has run 222 tests leading to 12 positives and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control has confirmed the other nine positive cases.

Sudders said at Thursday's press conference that she did not have the number of tests the state currently has the capacity to conduct each day at its own lab handy and the Baker administration did not provide the number in the hours following the press conference. Previously, state officials had pegged the capacity at around 400 tests per day.

Sudders said Thursday that, using South Korea as a model,

Massachusetts needs to be testing 3,500 people each day at a minimum, though she said she does not consider it a goal because “I don’t want to limit” the number of tests conducted. She suggested that 3,500 tests per day is simply the first number the state would like to ramp up to. The 3,500-per-day level “would be a good place to build from in our state,” she said.

In addition to ramping up the number of tests conducted, Sudders said the state is also working to put in place a prioritization of testing.

“The prioritization is front-line health care workers and first responders are obviously the very first individuals, then individuals who are hospitalized and sick to determine whether they have an upper respiratory illness COVID-19,” Sudders said.

Baker said Thursday that testing is just one piece of the puzzle, but that the increase in testing will lead to an increase in the number of cases identified here and will give rise to other problems.

“We need to get to at least 3,500 a day. But even once you get to 3,500 a day you have a whole series of other issues you have to start to deal with and respond to,” after ramping up testing, he said. He specifically mentioned the supply chain for personal protective equipment for health care workers and working with the federal government to ensure that there can be a steady stream of the essential gear for hospitals and others who need it.

Baker said he and other governors have “been banging on the door the federal government” to secure equipment from the national stockpile, and repeated his call for Washington, D.C., to similarly expedite its response to the pandemic.

“We in Massachusetts are doing the things we need to do to catch up, but there’s no question that the federal government

has a lot of catching up to do as well," he said.

During a press conference at the White House late Thursday morning, Vice President Mike Pence said that the nation's testing capacity is increasing every hour.

"We want the American people to know once again that testing is available in all 50 states and it is becoming increasingly available literally every hour of the day," Pence said. "Because of the public-private partnership that the president initiated several weeks ago with major commercial labs, I'm pleased to receive a report today that tens of thousands of tests are being performed every day."

Pence and President Donald Trump both said Thursday that they are planning to speak by phone with the nation's governors later Thursday.

Congress Passes Bill With \$1 Billion For MassHealth

By Matt Murphy

State House News Service

The state's Medicaid program is in line to receive an additional \$1.08 billion under a coronavirus relief package that cleared Congress on Wednesday, which would provide relief to Massachusetts as it braces for a possible surge in the number of people enrolling in MassHealth.

The more than \$1 billion in increased reimbursements would pad a budget of a more than \$16 billion at an agency that provides health coverage to nearly 2 million low-income and disabled

residents. The federal share of the MassHealth budget is typically over \$8 billion.

State officials are bracing for revenues to plummet as the economy comes to a standstill due to measures taken by the government to stem the spread of the coronavirus. School, casinos, bars, restaurants, malls and many workplaces have shut down.

U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey released the state's expected share of Medicaid funding under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act after it cleared the Senate Wednesday evening.

"The additional funding for Medicaid will ensure that all those who need assistance receive it," House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, who plans on Thursday to visit a breakfast and lunch distribution site for Springfield students, said in a statement. "Folks that receive Medicaid funding are usually some of the most vulnerable and this action is another step in the right direction to make sure that they are cared for."

The bill had already passed the House earlier in the week, and it's the second COVID-19 response bill to pass Congress with money for Massachusetts.

The state has already received over \$12 million in additional support. The bill now awaits the signature of President Donald Trump.

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley on Wednesday night circulated an email seeking to build support for community health center funding. Pressley, noting she has 15 centers in her district from Cambridge to Roxbury, said centers are being asked to do more and need resources.

"We must make sure the most vulnerable people in our communities receive the critical care they need," she wrote,

asking people to sign her open letter to Vice President Mike Pence, who is leading the White House Coronavirus Task Force.

Gov. Charlie Baker, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders plan at 10 a.m. Thursday to visit and tour a Quest Diagnostics lab facility in Marlborough where COVID-19 testing is occurring. The closed press tour will be followed by a media availability.

[Michael P. Norton contributed reporting]

GotChew food delivery service has you covered during the dine-in restriction

As Massachusetts officials enforce a State of Emergency due to the coronavirus, restaurants are being impacted in a significant way, being forced to serve food through delivery and pick-up orders. Luckily, New Bedford and much of the Southcoast area is being serviced by locally owned and operated GotChew food delivery company.

Currently, many GotChew partners are offering free and discounted delivery during the dine-in ban: Freestone's, Not Your Average Joe's, Sweet Ginger, Café Bon, Faneeks, Scottie's Pub, Barrett's Alehouse & Waterfront, People's Pressed, Buster's Sports Pub, Fay's Restaurant, Valley Top Tavern, Adriana's Mexican Restaurant, Mari Pizzeria, Nuno's Restaurant, Bayside Fairhaven, Cyd's Creative Kitchen, Tropical Smoothie Café, Juice'd Cafe, Spicy Lime, and Café Arpeggio.



GotChew adheres to CDC guidelines for sanitation and precautions and offers a 'contact-free delivery' service. Customers can request 'Contact-Free' delivery using their Special Instructions Box at check-out screen. Provide drivers with instructions on how you best want your order delivered.



Are you a restaurant that needs to add online ordering and delivery? GotChew can have you set up within two days. There is no sign-up fee. Head over to www.gotchew.co/partner and fill out the application.

Are you looking for work? GotChew is hiring drivers! Click here to apply: <https://www.gotchew.co/driver>

Amidst Closure, New Bedford's BP Zoo to Offer Virtual

Keeper Chats and Nature Connection Activities

The Buttonwood Park Zoo closed to visitors yesterday, in an effort to help stem the spread of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). The Mayor's office announced the closure in a press release on Monday afternoon and indicated that the Zoo will be closed until at least Sunday, March 22, 2020. The City is expected to make announcements regarding extended closures of the BPZOO and other city facilities later this week.

In an effort to keep our community connected during this trying time, the BPZOO will offer "Virtual Keeper Chats", an opportunity to spend time with Zoo Residents and ask questions in real time to Zoo Keepers and Educators. These chats will happen daily, beginning Wednesday, March 18, 2020 at 11:00 am on the Zoo's Facebook page. The videos will also be uploaded to the Zoo's YouTube channel.



"During this challenging time we wanted to create programming that allowed followers to stay connected to the Zoo in a fun

and educational way,” said BPZ00 Director, Keith Lovett. “Our daily social media offerings will hopefully brighten everyone’s day while also allowing us to continue with one of our key missions of connecting the community to wildlife and nature.”

Additionally, BPZ00 is posting Nature Connection activities daily on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter; ideas and suggestions that families can do together outside to alleviate stress.

“Spending time in nature can help relieve stress and anxiety, improve mood, and boost feelings of happiness and well-being,” said Carrie Hawthorne, Curator of Education at BPZ00. “We hope families will try these activities and share pictures and stories of how it went on our social media pages, so we can all feel connected as a community.”