

Baker: Data trends will dictate timing of economic reopening

It's all going to depend on the data.

Gov. Charlie Baker would not say Friday afternoon whether he plans to extend the economic shutdown currently due to expire May 4, but he detailed what he will be looking at when it comes time to make that decision.

"We are still in this surge and we need to recognize that this insidious and often invisible virus is still making people here in Massachusetts very sick," the governor said. He later added, "Our view going forward here is going to be that until we start to see some of that kind of information – the peaking of the surge and the move in the other direction – for some sustained period of time, we're not going to be interested in reopening anything."

Baker previously has pointed to White House guidance that recommended states could begin to resume greater levels of economic activity after documenting 14 days of declining case counts and on Friday said his administration plans to follow guidance from the federal government, other countries and public health experts before planning an economic reopening. He said Friday that the duration of positive trends necessary to reopen "varies depending upon who you talk to."

With 50,969 total cases and 4,946 cases newly reported Friday, Baker said Massachusetts is "sitting in what I would call the peak" but that his team has not seen anything in the daily data on testing, new cases, new hospitalizations and deaths "that would suggest that we're over the peak and heading down the other side."

Current conditions would not appear to support a resumption of widespread activity on May 4, which is 10 days away. Asked why he doesn't just extend his order closing non-essential businesses beyond May 4 now, Baker said his team is still following the day-to-day data in search of trends.

"I get the fact that people want a hard and fast answer on this one, and I keep saying that the hard and fast answer is going to be in the trend data," Baker said. He added, "We'll have more to say about it a little closer. I get the fact that people would like an answer, but any answer I give you today wouldn't be worth very much because it's going to be driven by what happens over the course of the next two weeks, which I can't – I don't have a crystal ball, I can't predict."

Earlier this week, the governor said he plans to "pull together the best and brightest minds from our business and public health and academic communities to work together to put together a thoughtful framework that can work in Massachusetts" and on Friday said his administration has already started to talk with public health experts and business leaders about reopening.

He also acknowledged again Friday that the steps the state has taken to staunch the spread of the coronavirus "have had significant economic dislocation for hundreds of thousands of people here in Massachusetts."

About 653,000 Massachusetts residents have filed unemployment claims in the past five weeks, and more than 200,000 others applied for a new unemployment program open to self-employed and gig workers who did not previously qualify. Baker said the state's system for processing claims from newly-eligible workers was launched 10 days ahead of schedule and has already processed more than 100,000 of the new claims.

"On the one hand, it's mindboggling and concerning that so many people are filing for unemployment," he said. "But on the

other hand, I'm glad our system has been able to keep up and actually process claims so that these folks can get the support that they need."

He added, "Sadly, the economic toll that's with us is going to be with us for a while, there's no question about that."

During Friday's press conference, Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders said the administration is filing for two new waivers from the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services in hopes of giving the MassHealth program more flexibility to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

"Our requests include expanding Medicare telehealth coverage to include services provided by phone, as well as video, to increase access to health care for seniors and individuals with disabilities who may not have readily available access to video technology," Sudders said. "Additionally, we're allowing MassHealth flexibility to qualify for coverage for individuals who may be eligible but have not submitted all their forms to the state, providing flexibility with respect to federal provider payments limits to enable MassHealth provide critical stabilization funds for health care providers ... in addition, being able to enroll individuals into MassHealth for 90 day period, while we ensure we have all the documents available for them."

Friday's press conference also marked the return to the podium for Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, who has recovered from her own bout with COVID-19. She said Friday, "People can and do recover, and we need to remember that."

Baker said he was glad to have Bharel back at work and back at the public updates on the state's fight against COVID-19 and pointed out that the virus he likes to call "insidious" even got to Bharel, a "really committed social distancer."

"Even under that scenario, the virus found a way to get to

her,” he said. “And I think, in many ways, that’s a story that plays out thousands and thousands and thousands of times all over the country and all over the world, and that’s part of the reason why the tracing program is ultimately going to be hugely important.”

At the end of his prepared remarks on what he said was “another difficult week in managing our way through the surge,” Baker spoke about encouraging and inspiring stories he hears from people all over the state. He talked about high school seniors taking jobs at grocery stores since their last year of high school was cut short, and businesses upending their operations to contribute to the fight against COVID-19.

“We also see little glimmers of hope all around us,” he said. “And I hope that all of us will use that as part of the fuel that we all need to not only get through the surge, but get to the other side and start to think about what the next act here in Massachusetts will look like.”

COVID-19 related deaths in Massachusetts drop for 5th straight day

Massachusetts Coronavirus Update



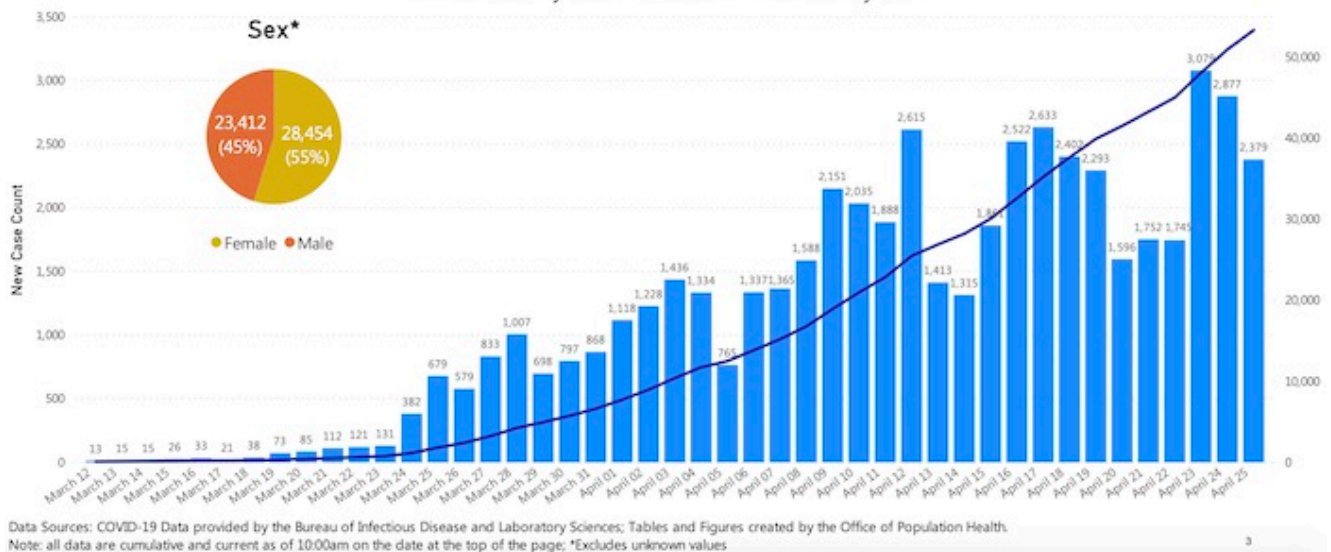
On April 25, the Massachusetts Public Health Department reported that the state added 2,379 more positive cases of COVID-19 bringing to total to 50,969. This is a decrease from Friday’s 4,946 reported cases.



Daily and Cumulative Confirmed Cases

Confirmed COVID-19 Cases To Date

● New Cases by Date ● Cumulative Total Cases by Date



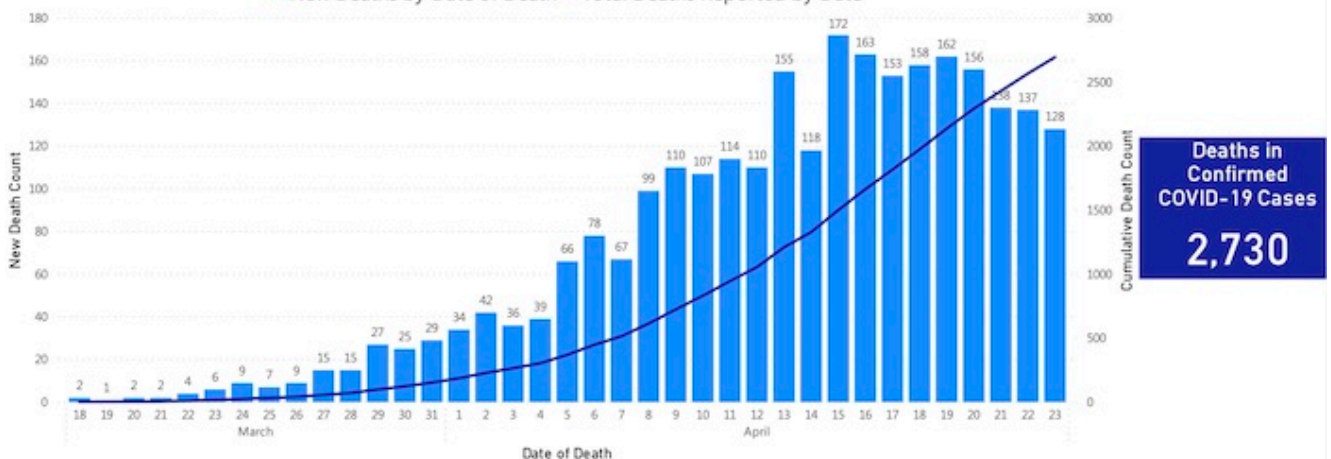
174 new COVID-19 related deaths were reported since yesterday, down from 196, bringing the total deaths in Massachusetts to 2,730.



Daily and Cumulative Deaths

Deaths* in Confirmed COVID-19 Cases by Date of Death

● New Deaths by Date of Death ● Total Deaths Reported by Date



Data Sources: COVID-19 Data provided by the Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences and the Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Tables and Figures created by the Office of Population Health.
Note: all data are cumulative and current as of 10:00am on the date at the top of the page; *Counts on the trend chart do not match total number of deaths reported, as there is a several day lag in reporting by date of death.

As of 4 pm today, 226,845 people in Massachusetts have been tested for COVID-19 – 11,632 new tests since yesterday. This

is the third straight day Massachusetts Health officials reported ten thousand or more tests.

New Bedford Coronavirus Update

Mayor Jon Mitchell's office reported 31 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases in New Bedford Saturday, bringing the total positive cases in the city to 441, **up from 410 on Friday**. One new COVID-19 related death was reported today bringing the total to 13. No specific details (age, sex of the patient, etc) are available.

The New Bedford Police Department welcomed home Sgt. Ortega who is recovering from COVID-19. Full details **here**.

Fall River Coronavirus Update

Fall River reported 23 more confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 on Friday. According to Mayor Coogan's office, Fall River has seen 337 total positive cases. 149 cases have cleared isolation. Full details **here**.

While case numbers released by the Massachusetts Department of Health suggest the Bay State isn't out of the woods in the COVID-19 pandemic, a local group is getting ready to show their displeasure over how the virus has been handled.

Sarah Rebello, who co-hosts a conservative radio show in Fall River, has organized a rally to take place at Government Center to express what she feels is an unconstitutional lockdown. Full details **here**.

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On April 24, the Massachusetts Public Health Department reported that the state added 4,946 more positive cases of COVID-19 bringing to total to 50,969. This is an increase from Thursday's 3,079 reported cases. 196 new COVID-19 related deaths were reported since yesterday, up from 178, bringing the total deaths in Massachusetts to 2,556. Full details **here**.

Governor Baker files Medicaid waiver for MassHealth flexibility

Governor Baker yesterday announced new federal waiver requests to provide the state's MassHealth program with more flexibility to respond to COVID-19, and provided an update on Massachusetts' successful implementation of the new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program.

MassHealth Waiver Requests: Massachusetts is filing two waiver requests with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) that will give the state and its Medicaid program, MassHealth, more flexibility to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency. If allowed, the waivers will build upon the two previously submitted waivers and enable MassHealth to deliver the most effective care to its members and support health care providers.

Through these waiver requests, the Commonwealth is seeking flexibility to address key areas of need:

Expand Medicare telehealth coverage to include services provided by phone and video, to increase access to health care for seniors and individuals with disabilities without readily accessible video technology. This expansion is consistent with telehealth coverage currently provided by MassHealth and commercial plans.

Allow MassHealth to waive the requirement that certain applicants and members spend down to qualify for coverage in cases of financial hardship.

Extend retroactive coverage for individuals who qualify for MassHealth to allow individuals to be covered up to 90 days prior to submitting their application.

Provide flexibility for federal provider payment limits to enable MassHealth to provide critical stabilization funds to health care providers.

Ease provider requirements that could result in unnecessary administrative burdens or barriers to care.

PUA Unemployment System Launch: Earlier this week, Massachusetts became one of the first states in the nation to successfully implement the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program established by the federal CARES Act. This program provides benefits for individuals who do not qualify for traditional unemployment benefits, but have lost their jobs due to COVID-19.

The platform launched on April 20, 10 days ahead of the previously scheduled launch date. Since then, the PUA system has so far processed well over 100,000 claims, and benefit checks, which include an additional \$600 as part of another federal CARES Act benefit implemented by the administration, are already being issued.

Visit www.mass.gov/pua to learn more and apply.

Another very busy week for Massachusetts State Police

K9s and their human partners

“As the Massachusetts State Police continue to perform specialized duties related to the state’s response to the Coronavirus emergency, traditional police work continues because crime doesn’t stop.

Last week was another busy one for the Massachusetts State Police K9 Unit, which deployed on 68 missions. MSP K9 teams responded to 25 incidents and operations handled primarily by State Police, and assisted local police departments around the state on 43 additional calls.

Missions included 26 patrol calls, six drug sniffs, one scent search for a gun and one other for a cadaver. Another mission was a search for a potentially suicidal person. Nine of the calls involved suspects reported to be armed, all with handguns.



Massachusetts State Police photo.

Three examples of the K9 Unit's work last week follow.

On the evening of April 15, MSP K9 Trooper Bill McSweeney

observed a vehicle that had been involved in a shooting in Brockton. The suspect vehicle attempted to strike Trooper McSweeney's cruiser and then fled into Stoughton with the Trooper in pursuit. The suspect stopped in Stoughton, got out of the vehicle, and continued to flee on foot. Trooper McSweeney deployed his partner Scully, who tracked the suspect through a swamp and pursued him out to the other side, where the suspect was apprehended by a Trooper on the perimeter.

On April 18, in the pre-dawn hours, K9 Trooper Dan Purtell responded to a call for a wrong-way driver on Route 3 in Burlington. The suspect, an alleged drunk driver, crashed and fled on foot. Trooper Purtell and his partner Neko tracked the suspect for about three miles but did not locate him. Later that morning, still well before daylight, Burlington officers spotted a person matching a description of the wrong-way driver in Cambridge Street.



Scully

Massachusetts State Police photo.

Upon seeing the officers the suspect ran into nearby woods. Trooper Purtell and Neko responded to the point where he was

last seen: Neko acquired a track and pulled behind a building and then into the wooded area. Well inside the woods, Neko suddenly turned left and displayed a proximity alert. Then, Trooper Purtell observed the suspect on the ground. After initially ignoring orders to surrender or face apprehension by Neko, the suspect wisely complied, was taken into custody, and was charged with operating under the influence, his fourth OUI offense.

Another pre-dawn mission was fulfilled that same morning, far across the state, when Trooper Greg Valentine responded to help Westfield Police search for a wanted suspect who was on foot. Trooper Valentine deployed his partner Kyber at the place where the fleeing suspect was last seen. Kyber acquired a track in a backyard and pulled across the street and eventually came to a six-foot high fence. Kyber began to bark and jump at the fence. The search team made its way around the fence and the suspect was located and apprehended by a perimeter officer.”

Boston Police Department welcomes officer Omar Borges home after month-long battle with COVID-19

“BPD Officers Flock to Beth Israel Hospital to Celebrate the Patient Discharge of BPD Officer Omar Borges Now Home Recovering from COVID-19:

On Friday, April 24, 2020, at about 5:00pm, a wonderfully joyous and emotional scene as hundreds of Boston Police

Officers gathered outside the Beth Israel Hospital's Rosenberg Building to cheer on and welcome home Officer Omar Borges upon his discharge from hospital care after a grueling, month-long battle with the coronavirus.

Officer Borges, who appeared at the front door in a wheelchair, was overcome by emotion upon being greeted by a thunderous ovation courtesy of his brother and sister officers, as well as, the nurses and doctors who treated and cared for him during his stay at the hospital. Officers looked on with tears in their eyes as Omar's family smothered him with hugs, kisses and love before entering a silver-colored SUV that transported Omar to his home.

Said Commissioner Gross, "This is a day to celebrate and, as you can see, Omar's family is happy to have him home." Yet, sadly, as happy as we are to celebrate Omar's return to good health, we would be remiss to not take a moment to keep in our prayers the family and friends of Boston Police Officer Jose Fontanez who succumbed to COVID-19 on April 14, 2020.

Said Commissioner Gross, "Today, we celebrate the release of Officer Borges while also remembering the loss of Officer Fontanez. This is a serious disease and it remains important for all of us to follow the steps required to lessen the spread of this virus."

Boston Police Department photos:



New Bedford Police Department welcomes home Sgt. Ortega who is beating COVID-19

The following is from the New Bedford Police Department.

"We have some great news to share!

Yesterday, we welcomed home our very own Sgt. Sam Ortega who is beating COVID-19! Sgt. Ortega returned home from a Boston hospital and sends his thanks to all those who have cared and prayed for him, his wife and family.

Thanks to New Bedford EMS and our great friends at Dominos on Ashley Blvd. through @Tony Squizzero, you made this hero's homecoming extra special!

#beatcovid19

#heros

#homecoming”

Warren calls for watchdog investigation into “border wall cronyism”

United States Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and House Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-Miss.) sent a letter to the Acting Inspector General of the Department of Defense (DOD), urging an investigation into the recent decision by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to award a \$569 million no-bid contract to BFBC, a company led by a Republican campaign donor, to build a section of President Trump’s border wall at above-average cost. Their letter asks for an investigation of whether the award of the contract to BFBC subverted federal procurement laws and resulted in taxpayer waste. The IG is already conducting an investigation into a \$400 million contract awarded to Fisher Sand and Gravel (FSG), another company led by a reliable Republican Party donor.

“Particularly now, as we must prioritize funding to save lives and to help the millions of Americans who have suffered severe economic harms as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, taxpayer funds must not be wasted, and Federal procurement processes must not favor campaign donors or personal favorites of the President,” the lawmakers wrote.

BFBC has so far received more than \$1 billion in taxpayer money to build the border wall. In this newest contract, USACE

is paying \$33 million per mile of border wall—a price that is more than 50% higher than the \$20 million per-mile average reported in January. This appears to be just the latest in a series of lucrative contracts awarded to Republican donors to build President Trump's border wall.

“Federal procurement and contracting laws prevent corruption, ensuring that taxpayer funds are spent to hire contractors that can do the job right, do it safely, and do it as inexpensively as possible,” wrote the lawmakers. “The Trump Administration's decision to award an expensive, no-bid contract for hundreds of millions of dollars to a company favored by the President calls into question the Administration's compliance with Federal procurement laws and demands a thorough investigation.”

In December 2019, the USACE awarded a \$400 million border wall contract to FSG, a company with a shoddy environmental and tax compliance record, after President Trump and Jared Kushner met privately with the Commanding General of USACE. In response to that award, Rep. Thompson sent a letter to the DOD Principal Deputy Inspector General, asking him to open an investigation. Senator Warren also sent a letter to USACE, asking for details on the solicitation and award of the contract. FSG remains under investigation by the DOD Office of the Inspector General.

Senator Warren has taken numerous steps to oppose President Trump's border wall. Less than three weeks after President Trump took office, she led colleagues on a letter to the Secretary of Homeland Security raising concerns about the potential diversion of funds from key DHS priorities to pay for the border wall. In February 2020, she introduced the Prioritizing Pandemic Prevention Act (S. 3510), to recoup all of the unobligated funds taken from Pentagon accounts to pay for the wall and redirect them to COVID-19 response. In February 2019, she introduced the Protecting Disaster Relief Funds Act (S. 534), to prevent President Trump from using

funds appropriated for disaster relief to fund construction of a border wall. In March 2017, Senator Warren cosponsored a bill (S. 668) to nullify President Trump's executive order that a border wall be built.

2020.04.23 Letter to DOD IG about border wall contract final

USACEreview

Massachusetts lawmakers seek federal assistance for cranberry growers amid coronavirus pandemic

United States Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Representative William Keating (D-MA-09), along with Senator Edward J. Markey (D-MA) and Representatives Richard E. Neal (D-MA-01), James P. McGovern (D-MA-02), Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA-08), Joseph P. Kennedy III (D-MA-04), Katherine Clark (D-MA-05) and Lori Trahan (D-MA-03), wrote to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) urging the agency to provide direct, financial assistance to the cranberry industry struggling to keep workers on payroll and remain afloat financially amid the economic collapse caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

"While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten jobs and local economies across the country... it is critical that our cranberry growers have the resources they need to keep staff employed on local farms," the lawmakers wrote.

As of 2015, the value of Massachusetts' cranberry industry was \$99.8 million and supported nearly 7,000 jobs. However, press reports have stated that, "Like many small businesses, farms could feel devastating effects of the pandemic" and that "farms and ranches that sell locally could see a decline in sales of as much as \$688.7 million." While the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act included \$9.5 billion for farmers, it is largely up to USDA to distribute it among livestock producers, specialty crop producers and those who sell at farmers markets.

Citing the projected economic losses for cranberry growers-as well as the industry's recent economic struggles due to overproduction and the impact of Chinese tariffs-the lawmakers urged Secretary Perdue to utilize all USDA programs to assist the domestic cranberry industry.

"Given the recent economic hardships of the cranberry industry, particularly in Massachusetts, we urge you to take action to ensure that the USDA considers the unique and dire situation of cranberry growers in the administration's economic response to COVID-19," the lawmakers continued.

In November, Senators Warren and Markey, along with Representatives Keating and Kennedy, wrote to U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer urging him to explore new markets for American cranberry growers to compensate for China's 40 percent tariff on imported cranberries, which had cost the industry an estimated \$42.8 million in losses over the past year.

04.23.2020 Letter from Sens. Warren & Markey and Reps. Neal, McGovern, Lynch, Keating, Kennedy, Clark, & Trahan to Sec. Perdue

FDA authorizes first COVID-19 at-home test collection kits

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized the first diagnostic test with a home collection option for COVID-19. Specifically, the FDA re-issued the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Laboratory Corporation of America (LabCorp) COVID-19 RT-PCR Test to permit testing of samples self-collected by patients at home using LabCorp's Pixel by LabCorp COVID-19 Test home collection kit.

"Throughout this pandemic we have been facilitating test development to ensure patients access to accurate diagnostics, which includes supporting the development of reliable and accurate at-home sample collection options," said FDA Commissioner Stephen M. Hahn, M.D. "The FDA's around-the-clock work since this outbreak began has resulted in the authorization of more than 50 diagnostic tests and engagement with over 350 test developers. Specifically, for tests that include home sample collection, we worked with LabCorp to ensure the data demonstrated from at-home patient sample collection is as safe and accurate as sample collection at a doctor's office, hospital or other testing site. With this action, there is now a convenient and reliable option for patient sample collection from the comfort and safety of their home."

This reissued EUA for LabCorp's molecular test permits testing of a sample collected from the patient's nose using a designated self-collection kit that contains nasal swabs and saline. Once patients self-swab to collect their nasal sample, they mail their sample, in an insulated package, to a LabCorp lab for testing. LabCorp intends to make the Pixel by LabCorp COVID-19 Test home collection kits available to consumers in most states, with a doctor's order, in the coming weeks.

The LabCorp home self-collection kit includes a specific Q-tip-style cotton swab for patients to use to collect their sample. Due to concerns with sterility and cross-reactivity due to inherent genetic material in cotton swabs, other cotton swabs should not be used with this test at the present time. The FDA continues to work with test developers to determine whether or not Q-tip-style cotton swab can be used safely and effectively with other tests.

This authorization only applies to the LabCorp COVID-19 RT-PCR Test for at-home collection of nasal swab specimens using the Pixel by LabCorp COVID-19 home collection kit. It is important to note that this is not a general authorization for at-home collection of patient samples using other collection swabs, media, or tests, or for tests fully conducted at home.

The FDA, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, protects the public health by assuring the safety, effectiveness, and security of human and veterinary drugs, vaccines and other biological products for human use, and medical devices. The agency also is responsible for the safety and security of our nation's food supply, cosmetics, dietary supplements, products that give off electronic radiation, and for regulating tobacco products.