

Morton Hospital in Taunton Converting to COVID-19 Center

By Michael P. Norton

State House News Service

The Massachusetts health care landscape is shifting again in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Steward Health Care on Saturday began transforming Morton Hospital in Taunton into a dedicated care center for patients who test positive for the virus. The company on March 17 made a similar move at its Carney Hospital in Dorchester.

Steward, a for-profit health care company unlike the many non-profit hospitals in the state, also suspended inpatient intensive care admissions at Nashoba Valley Medical Center in Ayer, saying the change will increase its overall ICU availability by redeploying staff and equipment to communities with increasing needs.

Another significant change: Steward is consolidating inpatient intensive care admissions at Holy Family Hospital by drawing resources from its Haverhill campus to the Methuen campus ICU unit over the next few days.

Steward says the size of the Holy Campus campus makes it possible to create an isolated unit in Methuen to care for COVID-19 patients.

Gov. Charlie Baker declared a coronavirus state of emergency on March 10, when the state had 92 confirmed cases. On Saturday, state public health officials reported 11,736 cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts, 216 deaths attributed to the virus, positive cases at 96 long-term care facilities, and hospitalizations of 1,068 COVID-19 patients. The state is operating under a stay-at-home advisory ahead of a surge in

cases that's expected to arrive as soon as Friday.

Dr. Joseph Weinstein, chief medical officer for Steward Health Care, said traditional models of care are ineffective at addressing the surge in virus cases, citing "lessons from Italy and China."

"Significantly lower infection and mortality rates were achieved in places like Germany and South Korea, where hospitals clustered COVID-19 patients in isolated locations, thus lessening the chance of infection for other patients and staff," he said.

The changes associated with the "proven isolation strategy," according to Steward, include better care and recovery chances for COVID-19 patients, reduced mortality rates, and better capacity for other Steward hospitals to care for patients undergoing treatments for health conditions unrelated to the virus.

Steward Health Care operates 35 hospitals in nine states and serves more than six million patients annually.

Nurses from Steward hospitals in Arizona and Utah began arriving in Massachusetts this week to assist with care, and more than 100 nurses from other Steward hospitals in Massachusetts have volunteered to be temporarily reassigned to hospitals with greater needs.

Steward also reported Sunday that it launched a program "months ago" to acquire and stockpile specialty ventilators and personal protective equipment to treat COVID-19 patients as part of preparations for the arrival of the virus. Once the coming surge declines, the company plans to move unused equipment to its other hospitals as those facilities deal with an influx of patients.

The claims about preparedness conflict with assertions from the Massachusetts Nurses Association, which represents more

than 2,750 nurses and health care workers in eight Steward-owned hospitals in Massachusetts. On Friday, the nurses union alleged that Steward is inconsistently providing protective equipment like N95 masks and gowns and that nurses “are forced to reuse soiled masks for days.”

"If the stockpile exists, there is a disconnect because the supplies are not generally accessible to staff when needed," the union said.

In a statement released by the nurses association on Friday, Carney Hospital nurse Peg Conlon said, “Yesterday there were not enough N95 masks available in the ICU, in the special COVID-19 units or anywhere in the hospital. What we do see is a dangerous rationing of PPE at Carney, which is a guarantee for more spread, and of a loss of staff as more of us become sick.”

Inadequate access to personal protective equipment has been a worldwide problem, putting health care workers at risk and aiding in the spread of the virus.

Baker on Sunday plans to visit a drive-through COVID-19 testing site in Foxborough at 12:30 p.m. Boston Mayor Martin Walsh plans a 3 p.m. virus update. At 4 p.m., U.S. Sen. Edward Markey holds a livestream discussion with Sara Nelson, international president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO.

Westport family seeks

public's help in finding missing woman

"Has anyone seen Jane Andrade?

She has been missing for the past 30 hours and her car and her phone were located at Horseneck Beach without her. They have stopped the helicopter search, but have continued the boat search using sonar.

She is the sweetest, most loving person, who would do anything for anyone!!! Very sad and unfortunately, Jane suffers and has been battling with depression and mental illness, seriously, almost one year to the day.

If you happen to see her, please contact the Massachusetts State Police Department or me (508-828-8739).

Please share this and get the word out! Thank you!"



Photo by Reed Andrade.

New Bedford Police Department

one of eleven Massachusetts departments that will distribute Fentanyl test strips

The Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative (P.A.A.R.I.) has partnered with 11 Massachusetts police departments to utilize fentanyl test strips as a new tool to engage people with opioid use disorder and help prevent overdose deaths.

The three-month pilot project, made possible by a \$150,000 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, launched this week and will continue through June. Through this project, police departments and their community partner agencies will distribute Fentanyl Test Strip Kits as an engagement tool for individuals at risk of opioid overdose.

In 2019, there were over 2,000 overdose deaths in Massachusetts, 93% of which involved fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is over 50 times more potent than heroin. Rapid fentanyl test strips are used to detect the presence of fentanyl in drugs, informing people about the increased risk of overdose and death. The test strips offer an additional layer of protection against fatal overdoses by informing users of the presence of potentially lethal fentanyl, though it is important to note that all illicit drugs are dangerous and could potentially contain fentanyl, and false negatives are possible. Ultimately, the kits are meant to inform and protect the health of people who use drugs, often leading them to change their use and behavior.

Through this pilot project, Fentanyl Test Strip Kits will be distributed by the participating police departments and their

partners, such as recovery coaches, to develop trust and build relationships with community members struggling with substance use disorders. This engagement tool may help to save lives and foster a person's readiness for a referral to treatment and long-term recovery.

A total of 11 police departments applied and have been selected for participation in the project:

- Beverly Police Department
- Chicopee Police Department
- Edgartown Police Department
- Holyoke Police Department
- Ipswich Police Department
- Lynn Police Department
- Methuen Police Department
- New Bedford Police Department
- Taunton Police Department
- Whitman Police Department
- Winthrop Police Department

The 11 participating departments were trained on the program on March 27 and began distributing the kits this week.

The Fentanyl Strip Test Kits contain three fentanyl test strips, a brochure on how to use the test strips, a COVID-19 safety handout, a card on how to obtain nasal naloxone (NARCAN), a card on the Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline and a card on how to contact a P.A.A.R.I. recovery coach. Departments will hand out the Fentanyl Test Strip Kits as a supplement to their standard opioid related outreach handouts, which often includes NARCAN.

"As public servants, our police officers are tasked with protecting and serving all members of our community. P.A.A.R.I. just increased our ability to do that by building upon what is usually found in outreach kits," said Winthrop Police Sgt. Sarko Gergerian. "When you share one of these new

kits, you are sharing much more than just test strips. You are sharing a powerful message. A message that there is always hope even during what may seem to be the darkest of times.”

“The Whitman Police Department is committed to partnering with resources such as P.A.A.R.I. in order to help those suffering from substance use disorders onto the path to recovery,” Whitman Police Chief Timothy Hanlon said. “The Fentanyl Test Strip Pilot allows us another opportunity to offer treatment options outside of the confinements of traditional law enforcement activities.”

“The Edgartown Police Department is excited to be playing a role in this bold new approach to combating addiction and preventing overdose deaths. For those in our community who are suffering, it is our sincere hope that this initiative will play a real role in their recovery,” said Bruce McNamee, Chief of Police, Edgartown Police Department.

“Our law enforcement partners continue to serve on the front lines of the opioid epidemic and we are hopeful that this will provide them with a new tool in their toolkit to assist with access to treatment and lifesaving services,” said Executive Director Allie Hunter. “We are encouraged by the dedication of the departments that are participating in this pilot project and we look forward to seeing the impact it may have.”

P.A.A.R.I. will provide training and technical assistance throughout the pilot project and will work with the selected police departments to determine the pathways, programs and partners in the respective community to help carry out the distribution of fentanyl test strips. P.A.A.R.I. has also worked with community partners and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to design and create educational training materials to assist in implementing the pilot program, including roll call training videos.

P.A.A.R.I. is also providing technical assistance, support and

materials for departments to implement this project amid COVID-19 as all departments have adjusted their public engagement procedures to adhere to public health and safety advisories.

“People with substance use disorders are even more vulnerable and face more barriers to treatment amid COVID-19,” P.A.A.R.I. Project Manager Vanessa Lopes-McCoy said. “This work is more important than ever, and we are so grateful to the 11 police departments and all of our project partners for collaborating with us on this pilot project during this challenging time.”

The Beverly, Chicopee, Lynn, Methuen, New Bedford and Taunton Police Departments have been selected to participate in a more extensive evaluation to assess all aspects and outcomes of the project. Brandeis University will serve as the project’s evaluation partner with Traci Green, PhD, MSc, Professor and Director of the Opioid Policy Research Collaborative serving as the principal investigator. At the conclusion of the pilot project, P.A.A.R.I. will hold a convening to share the project’s results and findings.

“Harm reduction services like fentanyl test strip distribution are essential to keeping people who use drugs safe, and there’s never a more important time than now to emphasize that message. Together with my colleagues from Northeastern University and the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, we are excited to evaluate the fentanyl test strip pilot program among police departments and community programs,” Green said.

“We are thankful to P.A.A.R.I. and Brandeis University for their partnership,” said Deirdre Calvert, Director of the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. “We continue to make sure our most vulnerable constituents have access to these life-saving tools.”

“I am optimistic that the Fentanyl Test Strip Kits will have a

similar success in saving lives as we have experienced with Naloxone. I am grateful for P.A.A.R.I.'s progressive thinking in implementing such an innovative strategy," said New Bedford Chief of Police Joseph Cordeiro.

"P.A.A.R.I. is extremely grateful and proud to be selected for this innovative pilot project by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Providing our law enforcement partners with fentanyl test strips will absolutely save the lives of people unknowingly using deadly fentanyl instead of the substance they think they're using. I applaud the Governor, Legislature, DPH and our frontline police departments for embracing this life-saving initiative," said P.A.A.R.I. Co-Founder and Board Chair John Rosenthal.

To Wear or Not to Wear a Mask

By Michael Rocha, MD

New Bedford, Massachusetts – In a well-meaning effort to fight COVID-19, there is a lot of information and even more opinion circulating about the use and effectiveness of various masks. The controversies can be confusing. Guidelines have wavered and different countries have adopted a spectrum of approaches.

As a part of their national strategies, some countries have encouraged widespread use of masks, both in healthcare and for the public. Notably, there was widespread mask usage by the US public during the 1918 flu pandemic. On April 3, 2020, the CDC made the recommendation to wear "cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) especially in areas of significant community-based transmission." (CDC.gov)

There are two types of masks commonly used by healthcare professionals: N-95 masks and surgical masks. The indication for when each is used often depends on whether the virus may be in aerosolized form or droplet form. An aerosolized virus is suspended in the air like a gas or fog and may be present for three hours in some settings. This is often much more transmissible and is the greater threat to healthcare professionals. A droplet virus particle is a relatively heavy particle that falls to the ground or any surface by gravity, usually within 6 feet.

N-95 masks are among a class of masks that are named based upon how many particles are filtered. A N-95 mask can filter 95% of particles in the air and must be professionally fit-tested to ensure a complete, proper seal. They are widely used for diseases such as tuberculosis. Currently, they are being used in situations when there is extremely close contact such as when a breathing tube is placed.

N-95 masks were made to be used once and discarded. In the current pandemic, healthcare workers are often given a single N-95 mask to last a day or more and may be reused. It's unclear if the masks retain their effectiveness after a few hours. Production of N-95 masks is being increased but is limited by lack of materials. There are not nearly enough N-95 masks currently available to keep every healthcare professional adequately protected. EVERY available N-95 mask should be in the hands of healthcare professionals.

Surgical masks are made of moisture-resistant inner- and outer layers with an inner filter. They are used in hospital situations where the risk of aerosolized virus particles is low. Surgical masks are not airtight but when worn correctly, provide protection. They are currently being used by hospital personnel in situations where aerosolized virus is not a concern. Supply is not unlimited and this is playing a role in the conflicting recommendations by various health and governing bodies. Like N95 masks, surgical masks should be

saved for use by healthcare workers.

There is another type of mask that you likely see frequently: cloth masks. These masks are not hospital-grade but are being used by healthcare professionals when N-95 and surgical masks are not available. Some healthcare professionals are using cloth masks over N-95 masks to extend their potential life-span. These are the masks that are now recommended for the general public to use.

There are limitations to use of cloth masks but they may have a critical role in slowing the spread of COVID-19. A cloth mask itself will not prevent the person wearing it from contracting COVID-19. Its ability to filter air particles is at best 50% and unlike N-95 masks, it does not have a tight seal around the mouth and nose. If it is not taken off properly, there is a risk of contaminating oneself and any surface it touches.

One purpose of a cloth mask is to prevent the person wearing it from spreading COVID-19. The cloth mask prevents secretions from spreading by essentially collecting them on the fabric. They may also help remind people to avoid touching their face. If every person wore one when in public, it could help prevent asymptomatic people from spreading the virus.

In countries that encourage universal mask usage by the public, there appears to be a slower spread of the virus which is critical to preventing our healthcare system from becoming overwhelmed. Wearing a mask reduces the transmission of the virus from one person to another. It's crucial though that people wearing a mask avoid a potential false sense of security. The role of a cloth mask is in conjunction with, not in place of, social distancing and good hand hygiene.

If you do wear a mask, please learn to use it properly to ensure safety and effectiveness. Before putting it on, wash your hands and make sure the mask is clean. Determine the

orientation of the mask (which side is inside/outside and which edge is close to the nose). Marking this with a pen is a good idea if you plan on removing and reusing it through the day before washing it. If the mask gets moist or wet, it may not be as effective and it may breed germs.

If any obvious contaminants or droplets land on the mask, remove and do not reuse until it is washed. Avoid readjusting the mask after exposure, but if you must, use washed hands to do so and wash your hands after you adjust the mask. Do not readjust your mask with unwashed hands. Have a high index of suspicion that the straps or loops of the mask may be contaminated.

If you store an unwashed mask in a paper bag or container you can contaminate the inside of the mask if you orient it in alternating positions. Assume the outside of the mask is contaminated and treat surfaces that it may touch as contaminated. Wash the mask often and after every use, as regular laundry soap deactivates the virus. It's best to have at least two masks so that if one becomes moist or soiled, another is available while the first is washed. Know the limitations of the material of the DIY mask.

If you decide to use a mask, please save ALL N-95 and surgical masks for our healthcare professionals and first responders. They have the greatest exposure and it appears that healthcare professionals who contract COVID-19 may have a more severe case. We MUST protect our protectors.

The CDC has now recommended cloth masks for all when going out in public for essential needs. This will now be an important part of our efforts along with social distancing and hand washing to do our job and beat this virus.

#Masks4All #SaveN95SurgicalMasks4Healthcare

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- Mask Facts(2020) Website Maskfacts.org Facts about masks and best-practices for mask creation, design, and use.
3M Website April 2014 PDF Key Differences Between Respirators and Masks

Media Articles from March-April 2020:

- COVID-19: WHY WE SHOULD ALL WEAR MASKS – THERE IS NEW SCIENTIFIC RATIONALE Dr. Sui Huang in Medium.com on March 26, 2020
- Keeping the Coronavirus from Infecting Health-Care Workers What Singapore's and Hong Kong's success is teaching us about the pandemic. Atul Gawande, MD in New Yorker on March 21, 2020
- Not wearing masks to protect against coronavirus is a 'big mistake,' top Chinese scientist says. Jon Cohen in Science Magazine on March 27, 2020
- To fight the spread of coronavirus, it's time to wear masks in all hospitals. Harlan Krumholz, MD in Washington Post on March 31, 2020
- Wear a Mask. No, Don't Wear a Mask. Wait: Yes, Wear a Mask.

Danielle Kosecki In Elemental by Medicium on March 31, 2020

• Why Telling People They Don't Need Masks Backfired. by Zeynep Tufekci in New York Times Opinion on March 17, 2020

1,334 new positive cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts, 216 total deaths

On April 4, the Massachusetts Public Health Department reported that the state added 1,334 more positive cases of COVID-19 bringing to total to 11,736. 24 new deaths were reported bringing the total deaths in Massachusetts to 216.

As of 4 pm today, 68,800 people in Massachusetts have been tested for COVID-19 – 5,838 in the past 24 hours.



New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell's office reported Saturday afternoon that **New Bedford has a total of 54 positive cases of COVID-19**, up from the **49 cases they reported on Friday** and up from 42 on Thursday.

The City of New Bedford Board of Health Friday afternoon issued a cease and desist order to the Walgreens store located at 1103 Kempton Street. Earlier this week and month, Walgreens confirmed that three of their employees tested positive for COVID-19. Full details **here**. You can see our interview with Mayor Mitchell on Friday:

At 4:30 pm today, Fall River reported an additional 6 cases

bringing the total in the city to 57. Full details [here](#).

Earlier this week, Governor Baker detailed the latest model projections that estimate the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts could range from 47,000 to 172,000 (or 0.7% to 2.5% of the total population of Massachusetts). The models show hospitalizations would potentially peak between April 10-20. Full details [here](#).

According to the CDC, as of April 4, the total amount of cases in The United States is 301,902 with 8,175 total deaths.

New Bedford at 54 positive cases for COVID-19 as of Saturday afternoon

New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell's office reported Saturday afternoon that New Bedford has a total of 54 positive cases of COVID-19, up from the **49 cases they reported on Friday** and up from 42 on Thursday.

The City of New Bedford Board of Health Friday afternoon issued a cease and desist order to the Walgreens store located at 1103 Kempton Street. Earlier this week and month, Walgreens confirmed that three of their employees tested positive for COVID-19. Full details [here](#).

You can see our interview with Mayor Mitchell on Friday:

On April 3, the Massachusetts Public Health Department reported that the state added 1,436 more positive cases of

COVID-19 bringing to total to 10,402. 38 new deaths were reported bringing the total deaths in Massachusetts to 192. Full details and breakout by county [here](#).

According to Fall River Mayor Paul Coogan, **Fall River now has 51 confirmed cases of COVID-19** as of Friday. **The Fall River Fire Department has reported two positive COVID-19 cases with their fire fighters.**

Bristol County is now up to 517 confirmed cases as of 4 pm on Thursday, up from 424 on Thursday.

Earlier this week, Governor Baker detailed the latest model projections that estimate the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts could range from 47,000 to 172,000 (or 0.7% to 2.5% of the total population of Massachusetts). The models show hospitalizations would potentially peak between April 10-20. Full details [here](#).

“Star” of Fall River live show, “Biscotti” gets a forever home!

“We saved the best for last! Our special needs kitty, who was spotted during the live show with Fall River Reporter, has gone home!

She saw him on the feed (while he was being loved and squished and she fell in love. He has no idea yet, but he has landed himself a wonderful home with a new mama who will love him, and squish him, and spoil him rotten!

We couldn't have asked for a better match! Congratulations "Biscotti" on your Gotcha Day." -Forever Paws Animal Shelter.
300 Lynwood St, Fall River, MA 02721, (508) 677-9154.

Massachusetts State Police, local police and MassWildlife transport moose to safety

On Wednesday, April 1, 2020, Massachusetts Environmental Police Officers followed up on a report of a moose in Blandford.

Over the course of several days, MEP, Massachusetts State Police, and personnel from MassWildlife responded to keep the animal away from Route 23 and I-90.

It was determined the safest course of action was to immobilize and relocate the moose. Officers from MEP and Troopers from MSP secured the area to ensure the animal would not travel into the busy roadways, while specially trained personnel from MassWildlife successfully immobilized the moose.

With the assistance of MSP, Blandford Police Department, and Good Samaritan bystanders, the moose was loaded into a vehicle and subsequently transported to an undisclosed rural location where it was monitored until it fully recovered from the effects of the immobilization agent.

Largest teachers union in Massachusetts wants MCAS canceled

Matt Murphy

State House News Service

The state's largest teachers union wants the Senate go a step further than the House did on Thursday and mandate the cancellation of the MCAS standardized this year.

"Any remote learning that is happening should focus on creative efforts to help students stay connected to their educators and each other, as well as to deepen their understanding of material they have already learned – not prepping for a test," Massachusetts Teachers Association President Merrie Najimy said in a Friday statement.

The House on Thursday evening passed a bill that would allow Education Commission Jeff Riley to suspend testing requirements for 10th and 12th graders, but ensure that if a senior is required to pass the MCAS to graduate that they be given a time other than this spring to take the exam. The bill also mandates that testing requirements for third graders and eighth graders be modified or waived.

Riley has not said what he intends to do, but said he would make a decision quickly after being given the authority. The MTA said it has "no information as to what a modified test would look like, what its purpose would be or who would have to take it." According to the union, New Hampshire and Maine have already waived their testing requirements.

Walgreens on Kempton Street in New Bedford given cease and desist order

The City of New Bedford Board of Health this afternoon issued a cease and desist order to the Walgreens store located at 1103 Kempton Street. Earlier this week and month, Walgreens confirmed that three of their employees tested positive for COVID-19.

Walgreens reported that two employees tested positive and that those employees haven't returned to the location since March 13. On March 25, a third employee was evacuated for COVID-19 and that employee has since tested positive.

Mayor Jon Mitchell discussed the Walgreens incident today in our live interview:

Late this afternoon, Walgreens was served the following cease and desist order by New Bedford's Board of Health:



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD
JONATHAN F. MITCHELL, MAYOR

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

BOARD OF HEALTH
PATRICIA L. ANDRADE, M.D.
CRAIG LONGO, M.D.
SARAH MORRIS, M.D.

DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
DAMON CHAPLIN

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION

ORDER TO CEASE AND DESIST

The City of New Bedford Board of Health hereby orders your store:

Walgreens, Inc., Store # 6850, located at 1103 Kempton Street, New Bedford, MA
(Firm Name and Address)

to cease from continuing to operate until such time as it has (1) provided sufficient documentation to the Board demonstrating it has performed enhanced cleaning and disinfection of the store facility during its closure to the public; (2) removed from the facility all employees suspected or confirmed to be infected with COVID-19; and (3) allowed other employees to return to work at the store only upon receiving documentation from a physician that the employee's return to work does not pose a direct threat to others.

The basis for this Order is that the New Bedford Health Department has been notified that several store employees who worked recently at the Walgreens store at 1103 Kempton Street in New Bedford have tested positive for COVID-19.

You are hereby directed to immediately Cease and Desist all retail service operations and to perform enhanced cleaning and disinfection of the store during the closure period in a manner consistent with the most recent CDC guidelines, which are available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>. You may only reopen the store with the express written authorization of the New Bedford Health Department, which will not be provided unless you have provided sufficient documentation that enhanced cleaning and disinfection of the store has occurred. Such documentation can be in the form of an itemized and dated list of services provided by a third party or a sworn statement from an authorized Walgreens representative. If you fail to cease and desist, the Health Department will fine you to the maximum extent permitted by law and/or commence court proceedings.

Date 4/3/20

Jayline Medeiros
Printed Name of Responsible Person

[Signature]
Signature of Responsible Person

Damon Chaplin
Printed Name of the Agent of the Board of Health

[Signature]
Signature of Agent of the Board of Health

1213 PURCHASE STREET • NEW BEDFORD, MA 02740
TEL. (508) 991.6199 • FAX (508) 991.6291 • TTY/TTD (508) 979.1739

As of this morning, New Bedford has a total of 49 positive cases of COVID-19, up from the 42 cases they reported on Thursday and up from 33 on Wednesday. Full details [here](#).