

# Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel Tests Positive For COVID-19

By Matt Murphy

State House News Service

Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, who has been at the center of the state's efforts to respond to the outbreak of a deadly coronavirus, has tested positive for COVID-19, according the Department of Public Health, and will recuperate at home as she continues to work remotely.

Bharel, in a statement, said she was tested Thursday night and received her results back Friday.

"As the public health commissioner and an essential state employee, I have been vigilant about practicing social distancing from my colleagues and members of the public. My symptoms so far have been mild. I have notified my appropriate close contacts and will rest and recuperate at home, while continuing to carry out my work responsibilities remotely," Bharel said in a statement.

The Department of Public Health said its offices, which are also headquarters for the coronavirus command center being led by Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, will be "thoroughly cleaned over the weekend."

Bharel has been a frequent presence at Gov. Charlie Baker's daily press briefings since he declared a state of emergency on March 10, and the two appeared live in WCVB's studios for the Sunday talk show "On the Record" on March 15. Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito is also a constant presence at those State House briefings.

Baker's office said the governor will not be tested as a result of Bharel's diagnosis, and remains asymptomatic.

"Lt. Governor Polito and I wish Dr. Bharel a speedy recovery and are glad she is recuperating at home," Baker said in a statement Friday night. "Dr. Bharel is doing exactly what everyone should be doing, which is staying home if you feel sick and taking this virus very seriously."

The spokeswoman for DPH, Ann Scales, said all of Bharel's "close" contacts have been notified, and do not include the governor.

"As referenced in our statement, she has practiced social distancing and has not been in contact with him since becoming symptomatic," Scales said. DPH did not say whether Sudders would be tested.

Bharel is the highest-ranking public official so far in Massachusetts to be diagnosed with COVID-19. Earlier this week, state Rep. Mike Day of Stoneham said he had tested positive, making him the first member of the Legislature to have a confirmed case of the coronavirus.