New Bedford will offer free masks to any resident who wants one

Mayor Jon Mitchell announced that the City of New Bedford has launched MaskNB, an initiative in partnership with the Southeastern Massachusetts chapter of the American Red Cross and Joseph Abboud Manufacturing Corporation, to continue to promote the widespread use of masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by offering a mask to any City resident who wants one at no cost, at a series of drive-through distribution events in late May and June.

Mayor Mitchell explained the reason for making the masks available: “The scientific basis for widespread mask use is growing stronger, but in order for that knowledge to make a difference, we need to take individual and collective action. At an individual level, that means remembering to always wear a mask whenever you cannot practice social distancing.

Mitchell added, “Collectively, it means finding ways to help each other adjust to the ‘new normal’ of daily mask-wearing. By supplying enough masks for all our residents, we are not only taking an important step in that direction, but we are doing something unique that few cities have been able to undertake. In this case, the commitment of American Red Cross volunteers, the creativity and determination of Joseph Abboud workers, and key city government departments, all came together to make the impossible, possible. They all deserve our thanks and admiration.”

“We’re proud to partner with the City of New Bedford and Joseph Abboud Manufacturing Corporation to distribute masks to local citizens. Public safety is an important mission of the Red Cross, and together we can help stop the spread of the

COVID virus and protect our loved ones and neighbors," said Barbara Cotton, executive director of the Southeastern Massachusetts chapter of the American Red Cross.

"We are proud to continue to support New Bedford's efforts to fight COVD-19," said Joe Bahena, CEO of Joseph Abboud Manufacturing Corporation. The designer menswear manufacturer, based in the City's North End, retooled its facility to produce masks early in the COVID-19 response effort, and has continued to refine its operations to meet the City's needs.

Under the MaskNB distribution plan, interested residents in each of the City's six Wards will have an opportunity to obtain free cloth face masks at New Bedford High School, 230 Hathaway Boulevard, on the following assigned dates and times:

Ward 1 Saturday, May 30 – 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Ward 2 Sunday, May 31 – 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Ward 3 Saturday, June 6 – 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Ward 4 Sunday, June 7 – 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Ward 5 Saturday, June 13 – 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Ward 6 Sunday, June 14 – 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The dates are listed at www.masknb.com. Additional dates may be announced based on available supplies.

Residents should arrive at the main vehicle entrance of New Bedford High School, located at 230 Hathaway Boulevard, and remain in their vehicles as Red Cross volunteers hand out masks based on their requests. Residents are asked to limit their mask requests to those in their household and/or any elderly or vulnerable neighbors (who have been advised against leaving their homes).

In late April the City announced the first phase of its mask distribution effort, with a goal of delivering roughly 50,000 Abboud-made masks to first responders, essential workers, and vulnerable populations, including residents and staff of nursing homes, long-term care facilities, senior living

facilities, shelters, and New Bedford Housing Authority facilities. Masks are also being provided to staff and patients of the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, the staff and clients of the Meals on Wheels program, and elderly clients of the Immigrants Assistance Center. To date, the City has distributed more than 20,000 masks.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the wearing of cloth face coverings in public where social distancing is difficult to maintain; cloth face coverings are not a substitute for medical-grade masks, but provide more protection against the spread of viruses than not covering one's face. More information about the use and effectiveness of cloth face coverings to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is available at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html.

Mayor Mitchell declared a state of emergency in New Bedford on March 13 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The City has since announced a range of measures to safeguard public health, including stringent requirements on nursing homes and senior living facilities, workplace safety protections, and regulations on food vendors and restaurants to protect their staff and customers.