

**Announcements**

**Commissioner –** Margret Cooke

* Formerly served as General Counsel for the Department – provided legal and strategic counsel on several public health issues.
* Recognized the vital and challenging work being done by public health professionals across the state.

**COVID-19 Therapeutics** – Dr. Estevan Garcia, Chief Medical Officer, DPH

* Treatments
	+ Oral
		- *Paxlovid*: mild to moderate disease; indicated for 12 years and older (40kg); initiated within 5 days; 3 tabs BID for 5 days; works by inhibiting viral replication; free with provider prescription.
		- *Molnupiravir:* mild to moderate disease; indicated for 18 years and older; initiate within 5 days; 4 caps BID for 5 days; works by inducing mutations in viral RNA; free with provider prescription.
	+ Infusion
		- Monoclonal Antibody Treatment - *Sotrovimab*: indicated for 12 years and older; initiated within 10 days of symptoms; positive test; high risk groups; requires visiting an infusion center, urgent care, or emergency department.
		- Antiviral – *Remdesivir*: indicated for pediatric as well as adult patients (as small as 3.5kg); mild to moderate symptoms; initiate within 7 days of onset of symptoms; 3 daily infusions; recommended when Sotrovimab is not available.
* Prevention
	+ Injection
		- Monoclonal Antibody Prevention – *Evusheld*: preexposure prophylaxis (not a treatment and cannot be given post-exposure); indicated for 12 years and older; moderate to severe compromised immune system; single 2 injection dose.
* DPH working with providers across the Commonwealth to promote treatment options and make top of mind when evaluating COVID + patients

**FEMA Funeral Assistance Program** –Erica Piedade, DPH

* FEMA is providing assistance for COVID-19 related funeral expenses incurred after January 20, 2020, under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021, and the America Rescue Plan Act of 2021.
* The Funeral Assistance Program will provide financial assistance for COVID-19 related funeral expenses by providing up to $9,000 for funeral expenses.
* Specific information about eligibility: <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance>
* Every application must begin with a call to FEMA’s helpline. There is no online application and multilingual services are available.
	+ COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Helpline
		- 844-684-6333 | TTY: 800-462-7585
		- Monday – Friday: 9am-9pm EST

**Q**: Is this income dependent?

**A**: No. No income requirement is listed on the FEMA website.

**Q**:Does the individual who is applying for this need a death certificate that indicates the death was attributed to or caused by COVID-19? **A**:Yes. If the death occurred between January 20th and May 16th, 2020, and the death certificate does not attribute the death to COVID-19, they can include a signed statement from the certifying official, local coroner, or medical examiner.

**MAVEN Update** – Erica Piedade, DPH

* MAVEN webinars are moving to an every other week Tuesday presentation.
* Next webinar: Tuesday, March 1st at 11:00am
* Email hillary.johnson@mass.gov or scott.troppy@mass.gov with any questions or suggestions.

**Q&A Session**

Dr. Katie Brown – DPH

**Q**: If there is no reliable way to predict trends, what “real time” metrics will LBOHs be paying close attention to when considering mask ordinances etc., especially considering that most surveillance (wastewater, case counts by region) are beyond the scope of an individual LBOH?

**A**: There may not be a reliable way to predict trends, but there are many ways to track trends. I do not have recommendations about thresholds to use, but data points that I recommend for monitoring what is happening include: case counts (in your town, county and state), MWRA wastewater trends (especially for those in eastern MA: <https://www.mwra.com/biobot/biobotdata.htm>), deaths, hospitalizations, increases in the occurrence of local clusters, school cases and absences, and vaccination rates.

**Q**: What guidance can we give to families who do not plan to isolate a COVID positive family member?

**A**: Isolation of positive COVID cases for at least 5 days is still a public health requirement and not optional. People who test positive for COVID-19 should not go into public until at least 5 days after their symptom onset date/positive test and should wear a mask for days 6-10.

* If people cannot successfully isolate from their household members, then unvaccinated or not up-to-date household members should quarantine during their exposure and then for 5 days after their last exposure. Under this situation everyone in the household should be masked – the case should stay 6 feet away from others to the extent possible, use their own bedroom and bathroom (if possible), not share eating or drinking utensils, practice good hand hygiene and be sure to cover coughs and sneezes.
* The CDC does have transmission risk categories. I think they are going to have to move away from those because there have been changes in the way testing is happening so case counts per 100,000 people is going to have a different meaning now than it did before. However, I understand why the CDC metrics are designed the way they are. They are conservative and almost impossible to get out of the red zone. They are one option that we have to use.

**Q**: To prevent any misinterpretation, please clarify that the mask advisory release on 2-15-22 intended use of the verbiage “fully vaccinated”, which differs from “up-to-date”.

**A**: “Fully vaccinated” means that an individuals completed the primary series of either:

* Two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine
* Two doses of Moderna vaccine
* Only one dose of Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen (J&J/Janssen) vaccine

“Up-to-date” on COVID-19 vaccination is defined as:

* Completed the primary series of Pfizer, Moderna, or J&J vaccine AND a booster dose OR
* Completed the primary series of Pfizer, Moderna vaccine within the last 5 months OR
* Completed the primary series of J&J vaccine within the last 2 months

**Q**: Is there an expectation that the definition of “fully vaccinated” may change to include recommended boosters?
**A**: The term “fully vaccinated” has been written into laws in various places which means it is not possible to change to the term up-to-date easily. However, up-to-date is more commonly used for other vaccines and I expect that over time, there will likely be a shift to that language.

**Q**: Are we considering something other than nose swabs for PCR, like throat swab or saliva collection? I ask because the PCR can be negative and AG+ within 24 hours of each other in testing for Omicron. The PCR seems somewhat elusive with Omicron.
**A**: Researchers and the FDA are certainly looking at the performance of different tests and there is research ongoing using other sample types. However, each test should only be used with the sample type which it is validated for. To add new sample types, a manufacturer needs to provide data about the functioning of the test using a new sample type and have that added to the EUA.

* Discordant test results happen – and can happen between any two test types. As a general rule, antigen tests are more prone to false negatives than false positives, but when transmission drops to low levels, the rate of false positives increases. Again, as a general rule, PCR results are considered both more sensitive and more specific, but any test result should be interpreted in context.

DESE – Anne Gilligan & Anne Marie Stronach

**Q**: In the mask wearing protocol updated January 10, 2022, where do I find information regarding students with disabilities or special needs who are COVID positive and cannot wear masks in schools?
**A**: On February 9, 2022, DESE released an update to the mask requirement. Effective Feb. 28th at 12:00am the DESE mask requirement will be lifted statewide. Masks are still required in school health care (nurses) offices and by federal requirement on buses. Positive individuals returning are to wear masks through day 10.

* It is important to note, a school district could establish a local requirement – see October 12 FAQ.

**Q**: DPH updated their advisory on masking stating that unvaccinated individuals should continue to mask indoors; why does this not apply to schools?

**A**: Individuals who wish to continue to mask, including those who face higher risk from COVID-19, should be supported in that choice. DESE and DPH strongly recommend unvaccinated individuals should continue to wear masks in school settings.

* It is important to note, a school district could establish a local requirement.
* In the school districts that received the 80% and went maskless prior to the mask mandate being lifted, it was interesting to see that many students, despite vaccination status or needs, continued to wear masks. We expect this to continue.

**Q**: Can schools opt to require students to test negative (that completed 5 days of isolation following a positive test) on day 6 when they return to school?

**A**: You cannot do that under our guidance. You would have to adopt a policy at the school or district level and then, in turn, make sure families are aware of that.

**Other Updates**

*Laurie Courtney – DPH*

* Thursday at 2pm there is a CDC COCA call. This will provide updated guidance for clinicians on COVID-19 vaccines. They are going to be presenting the updated recommendations for people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised, recommendations for vaccination following passive antibody therapy, and summarizing recommendations for COVID vaccinations by age group.
* For more information: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coca/calls/2022/callinfo_022422.asp>

*Jana Ferguson – DPH*

* Will be leaving DPH, and her last day will be March 11th.

**Q**: Any guidance for daycare setting for children aged 2-4 regarding masks while at daycare?
**A**: Have not seen any EEC guidance for providers.

**Questions answered from the Q&A chat**

Elizabeth Bennett       3:05 PM

Has there been any extension on the expiration date for iHealth at home test kits?

Jana Ferguson       3:16 PM

I haven't heard of an extension on the expiration date at this time.

wendy machmuller       3:18 PM

How does this last prevention medication differ from the actual vaccination?

Andrea foley       3:19 PM

will this presentation on treatment options be available/recorded to reference?

Jana Ferguson       3:24 PM

We don't record these webinars but do send out a copy of the slides.

Allison Brum       3:19 PM

Are the oral tablets available outpatient and inpatient?

Ruth Clay       3:20 PM

Is it income dependent?

This question has been answered live

Erica Piedade       3:27 PM

No - no income requirement from the FEMA website

Allison Brum       3:21 PM

Are they FDA approved?

Samuel Wong       3:26 PM

Remdesivir is FDA approved.  All other therapeutics have received Emergency Used Authorization from FDA.  For more info, please refer to FDA at: <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/emergency-preparedness-drugs/coronavirus-covid-19-drugs>

AnneMarie Fleming       3:23 PM

assuming must have COVID-19 on the death certificate?

This question has been answered live

Erica Piedade       3:31 PM

Yes

Anonymous Attendee       3:23 PM

Does the decease have to have a diagnosis of COVID or COVID related illness at the time of death?

Erica Piedade       3:26 PM

"The deceased person's death certificate must indicate the death was attributed to or caused by COVID19.

Marina Lent       3:28 PM

I have spent UNTOLD HOURS trying to develop appropriate metrics.  I'm glad I'm not the only one who's been stymied in this effort...

Suzy Feinberg       3:32 PM

Hi Katie - What do you think about the CDC transmission risk categories, even if not adopted by DPH?

This question has been answered live

Teresa Riley-Singh       3:33 PM

where is the MWRA wastewater trends available?

Jana Ferguson       3:31 PM

There is a link on the slide visible now. We will send these slides out, so you'll have them as a reference.

Erin Kirchner       3:37 PM

RE: wastewater data, biobot has county-specific data available, so it’s not just eastern ma (if people are interested) https://biobot.io/data/

Jill Salamon       3:42 PM

Did Dr. Brown say the CDC guidance was updated February 15?

Jana Ferguson       3:45 PM

The DPH mask advisory was updated on February 15.

Paul Sevigny       3:43 PM

I thought it was changed to have 3 months between fully vaccinated and up to date (instead of 5 months)

Laurie A. Courtney       3:40 PM

The time interval to the booster dose was only shortened for moderately to severely immunocompromised people. Otherwise, it remains 5 months

Nicole Kazarian       3:45 PM

Are masks required for students in the nurses offices well?

Jana Ferguson       3:46 PM

School nurse offices are considered to be health care settings and masks are currently required in health care settings.

Carolyn D'Amato       3:46 PM

Can schools opt to require students to test negative (that completed 5 days of isolation following a positive test) on day 6 when they return to school?

This question has been answered live

Anonymous Attendee       3:47 PM

can you review the data around vaxxed and unvaxxed masking. During omicron and delta we saw many cases among the fully vaxxed.  is there actual data on transmission of unvaxxed vs. vaxxed?

Catherine Brown       3:48 PM

Hi - unvaccinated people are still much more likely to get COVID than fully vaccinated or fully vaccinated and boostered people. There is some suggestion that people who are unvaccinated are more likely to transmit than vaccinated folks but the data are still limited on this

Brenda Healy       3:47 PM

Any guidance for daycare setting for children aged 2-4 regarding mask while at daycare

Laurie A. Courtney       3:49 PM

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coca/calls/2022/callinfo_022422.asp>

Jaclyn Tenaglia       3:49 PM

Can we please get the link to the COCA call emailed?

Laurie A. Courtney       3:52 PM

will be included in the post webinar email

Mary Ellen Sloan       3:50 PM

Regarding families who are not isolating- they are staying home and are vaccinated but do not plan to stay distant or mask in their own home. They plan to share meals, sleep in the same room and share a bathy

Catherine Brown       3:53 PM

We can only provide information. What I would remind them of is that if they are not up to date on vaccination then they are all required to quarantine at home while they are being exposed and for 5 days after the day of last exposure

Katherine Kelly       3:50 PM

FYI the COCA calls are always recorded and can be found later the same day.

Anonymous Attendee       3:52 PM

The COCA link:

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coca/calls/2022/callinfo_022422.asp>

Emily Harvey       3:52 PM

EEC Updates:

Effective February 28, 2022, the statewide mask requirement for schools and child care providers will be lifted. Programs should refer to their local boards of health or municipality to determine if there is any indoor mask mandate in place that applies to child care facilities.

The EEC protocols & Testing guidance were updated:

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/the-commonwealth-of-massachusetts-testing-for-child-care-program-for-eec-affiliated-child-care-programs-0/download>

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/covid-19-mitigation-protocols-and-guidelines/download>

Emily Harvey       3:54 PM

More from EEC:

EEC and DPH still strongly recommend mask wearing for unvaccinated individuals, positive individuals returning to care after five (5) days of isolation, and those who have had a close contact with a known positive case.

Healthline! (Please feel free to start sharing this resource with LBOHs and callers into 6800!)

Effective February 21st, programs can call or email the helpline with any questions at 857-488-4418 or EEChealthline@primary.health.

Examples of “When to Call EEC Healthline:”

Clarification on COVID-19 testing protocols (i.e., when to begin testing for a COVID-19 exposed individual who is asymptomatic.)

Clinical consultation for a COVID-19 positive and/or symptomatic case who has attended the program while infectious.

Technical assistance for an EEC program looking to develop or modify their infection control policies for families and staff/educators.

Constance Dolan       3:55 PM

New variant?

Constance Dolan       3:55 PM

B something?

***Webinar ended at 3:56pm.***