



# MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

*Every physician matters, each patient counts.*

## **March 17<sup>th</sup> MMS DPH Call**

Over the past weeks, Massachusetts Medical Society president Dr. Maryanne Bombaugh has received many questions about COVID-19 from members, particularly surrounding the evolving information regarding testing and caring for our patients.

The medical society requested a conference call with Massachusetts Department of Public Health officials. On Tuesday March 17, Commissioner Monica Bharel, Dr. Larry Madoff, Medical Director of the DPH Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences; and Dr. Catherine Brown, State Epidemiologist, joined a call with more than 1,300 physicians to talk about supply issues, testing recommendations and guidance, as well as treatment.

### **Commissioner's Update:**

Commissioner Bharel thanked the MMS for being incredible partners during this very important, unprecedented time and expressed her appreciation and gratitude for physicians on the frontlines. DPH understands the concerns of doctors and the urgent needs of our patients and health care professionals. DPH is working diligently to address these needs during this pandemic.

- Massachusetts has moved from a containment phase in COVID-19 to a mitigation phase, as COVID-19 is spreading through our communities. Massachusetts has evidence of local community-level transmission of unknown origin in seven counties.
- Social distancing measures are meant to slow the spread of disease in our community in order to build up our health care capacity so we can be prepared to handle the demands that COVID-19 puts on our health care system,
- DPH is posting the [current Massachusetts case summary](#) every day on the DPH website.
- The original CDC requirements for testing at the state lab were extremely limited to certain high-risk groups, most of them originally connected to travel.
  - New systems have been put in place based on federal approval. DPH will be doing more testing on people.
  - DPH state lab testing capacities have also been increased. With the automation tools put in place, DPH is now able to test approximately 400 patients per day.
  - DPH streamlined the process in order for physicians to submit labs to the state public health laboratory with the new clinical guidelines. The state public health laboratory will be testing any health care worker, including all health care professionals, including EMS.
  - DPH will prioritize those tests to help triage related to protecting the healthcare and critical infrastructure workforces and individuals at increased risk for severe illness.
  - If a patient/ individual fits into one the [testing criteria](#), physicians do not have to call the epidemiology line.
  - FDA has now approved both commercial and hospital labs to begin testing.

- COVID-19 is a mandatory reporting disease, so in most cases DPH receives the test results automatically at the state public health laboratory. It also goes directly to the ordering clinician, as well as to the appropriate local board of health and DPH will then follow up with the local board of health to ensure that appropriate contact tracing can be done.
- Of high critical importance for all of us is PPE. DPH made a request to the national stockpile and received less than 10% of the request. DPH is renewing that request.
- DPH recommends decreasing use of PPE in our daily activities to preserve for this important work. DPH has ordered the cancelling non-essential elective procedures, and put in place telehealth to help with preserving PPE.
- Telehealth can be used for any diagnosis and clinical interaction, not just COVID-19 and is available to all insurances.

**Resources:**

- **DPH State Epidemiology Lab: (617) 983- 6800 for clinical or epidemiological questions.**
- [Statewide 211-line questions from the general public. Dial 2-1-1 Press 2-6 for coronavirus](#)
- [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in Healthcare Settings](#)
- [DPH PUI Criteria](#)
- [DPH Guidance on Strategies to Optimize PPE and HMCC Contact Information](#)
- [What Healthcare Personnel Should Know about Caring for Patients with Confirmed or Possible COVID-19 Infection](#)
- [CDC What to Do If You are Sick](#)
- [Information and Guidance for Persons in Isolation due to COVID-19](#)
- [Information and Guidance for Persons in Quarantine due to COVID-19](#)