

COVID-19 and Personal and Community Preparedness
Bedford Board of Health – March 3, 2020

Are you prepared in the event of an emergency? Emergencies can take many forms – extreme weather, power outages, disasters, disease outbreaks and human-caused emergencies. To prepare, you can take action now by developing a preparedness plan. With the current Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, many people are thinking about what they might do should they be required stay home from work or school, away from public places and shelter in place. While the risk of COVID-19 in Massachusetts remains low, the Bedford Board of Health encourages residents to be prepared for any emergency.

In cases where an emergency requires that you shelter in place and stay at home, public health and safety officials will provide guidance on the necessary protective actions you should take. This could be as simple as remaining at home while officials clear a hazard nearby, or it could require more protective measures requiring quarantine in your home for a specific period of time.

Make sure you have a [Family Emergency Plan](#) that identifies where you, in your home, will go if asked to shelter in place. Your plan should address any special needs you or your family may have. If you receive regular medical treatments or home healthcare services, work with your provider to identify options if you are unable to leave your home for a period of time and identify the ways you will receive [information and alerts](#). If you or a family member have a disability or other access or functional need, please visit the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency's (MEMA's) [Access and Functional Needs](#) page for further information and planning guidance.

In preparing for any emergency, it is important that you have an [Emergency Kit](#). An emergency kit will provide you with the basics in the event you are without essential services, such as being without water or power or being unable leave your home to go to the store. There are other [things you can now do to prepare](#). In the case of COVID-19 where home quarantine may last two weeks, preparedness would include:

- Maintaining a first aid kit that includes a thermometer, acetaminophen like Tylenol to relieve pain and reduce fever, antibiotic ointment packs, gauze, bandages, scissors, tweezers, an emergency blanket, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, vitamins and fluids that contain electrolytes.
- Gathering hygienic products like soap, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, tissues, feminine care products and diapers for infants.
- Periodically checking your regular prescription drugs to ensure a continuous supply in your home. Ensure you have a 30 day supply of medication per person.
- Getting copies and maintain electronic versions of health records from doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and other sources and store them, for personal reference. Get help accessing [electronic health records](#).
- Talking with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick, or what will be needed to care for them in your home.

To prevent illness or, once an emergency is declared, to limit the spread of germs and infection:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and then discard the tissue or cough or sneeze into your elbow. This action may prevent those around you from getting exposed and possibly sick.
- Wash your hands often for at least 20-seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer which will help protect you from germs.
- Clean high-touch surfaces with a disinfectant that kills coronaviruses.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Practice other good health habits. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

During the emergency, follow instructions from public safety or public health personnel. Make sure your emergency kit is in an area that is dry and easy to get to. Listen to local television or radio and check the town website for updates. Conditions may change quickly.

If you become sick with any cold or virus it is wise to stay home. If COVID-19 does spread locally, perhaps consider working remotely. You could start the conversation with your supervisor now about the possibility of telecommuting.

If someone is sick in your home, use a disinfectant to clean surfaces that were touched by the infected person. People who are sick should not share a bedroom, bathroom, towels or eating utensils with other members of the household, and they should wear a face mask to reduce the spread of illness.

If you or a family member exhibit signs or symptoms or have confirmed illness you may be directed to employ a method for containing or protecting the spread of disease. These methods include: isolation, which separates sick people with a contagious disease; and quarantine, which separates and restricts people's movement. Isolation and quarantine help protect the public by preventing exposure to people who have or may have a contagious disease. You will be contacted by the Bedford Board of Health (BOH) if you are required to enter isolation or quarantine and you should exactly follow the conditions detailed to you by the Bedford BOH until public safety or public health officials tell you otherwise. Household members should stay home during isolation and quarantine, not allow any visitors and follow recommendations for heightened hygiene and use of personal protection equipment to reduce risk of airborne or droplet virus spread.

The Bedford BOH will continue collaborating with other town departments and the Bedford School Department to efficiently communicate any necessary protective measures for the community. BOH staff have regular communication with the [MA Department of Public Health \(DPH\)](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) who are keeping us updated on national and local conditions. The Bedford BOH is using current [CDC recommendations](#) to conduct risk assessment and public health management of persons with potential COVID-2019. Please note that this is a reference tool only and that definitive answers to manage potential cases are made by the Bedford BOH. You are advised to contact the Bedford BOH at (781) 275-6507 if you have

traveled to an [affected geographic area](#), currently China, Iran, Italy, Japan or South Korea within the past 21 days. If you have recently traveled to an [affected geographic area](#), currently China, Iran, Italy, Japan or South Korea AND are experiencing lower respiratory illness symptoms such as, but not limited to fever, cough, shortness of breath you are advised to self-quarantine and to contact your health care provider. Please note that while the incidence of COVID-2019 is rising in other countries, contact with the BOH is warranted only if there is a high degree of suspicion of contact or exposure with someone with COVID-2019 from those affected countries. Please visit the BOH website at www.bedfordma.gov/boh for updates on COVID-19 as they become available.