

Baker's New Mask Mandate Applies Statewide

Virus-Fighting Move a Step Toward "New Normal"



STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

Matt Murphy 5/1/20 5:14 PM

MAY 1, 2020.....Gov. Charlie Baker took a step toward preparing the public for what he said life might look like in Massachusetts when this period of staying at home to avoid infection ends, ordering all citizens to wear masks or facial coverings in public if they can't socially distance.

The executive order signed by Baker on Friday put added weight behind what had only been a recommendation from his administration up until now. It also gives businesses the authority to deny someone service if they don't wear a mask.

"We view this as common sense and an important way on a statewide basis to establish for the long-term a set of standards for what we would call the new normal," Baker said Friday during an afternoon briefing from the State House.

The order does not apply to children under 2 or anyone who cannot wear a mask because of a medical condition, and Baker said the Department of Public Health would be putting together guidelines for children aged 2 to 5.

The facial coverings, Baker said, don't have to be proper masks, but can be T-shirts or bandanas. He urged that people reserve medical grade masks for front-line health care workers.

The order supercedes an advisory issued by his administration on April 10 encouraging people to wear masks if they couldn't socially distance, and comes the same week Baker gave Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito a little over two weeks to craft a plan to begin a phased in reopening of the economy as soon as this month.

Baker said that he thought "people for the most part" adhered to the recommendation he made on April 10 to use a face covering in public.

"But I think we all believe that as part of the strategy around anything associated with reopening people are going to need a mask or a face covering if they're going to be close to

people. You can't always stay six feet away, and even if you can stay six feet away, especially if you're inside, you probably ought to have a face covering on," Baker said.

Under the new order that takes effect May 6, all employees and customers of grocery stores, pharmacies and other retail establishments that have been allowed to stay open during the public health emergency must wear masks at all times. The same goes for users and drivers of taxis, ride-hailing services and public transit.

Failure to comply can result in a fine of up \$300.

Asked specifically about joggers and bicyclists, Baker said if someone is running early in the morning and confident they won't encounter other people they might be able to exercise without a mask, but if they go running during the afternoon when more people are out they should probably cover their face.

Baker said some businesses and municipalities have already put in place similar policies.

"It's a big change, I think, for many people, but I'm hoping we get to the point where, as we move down the road here, I'm hoping we get to the point where it becomes the norm, because it should be," Baker said.

The Department of Public Health reported another 2,106 positive cases of COVID-19 on Friday and 154 new deaths from the disease, putting the total to date at 3,716 deaths.

The number of patients hospitalized with coronavirus continued to fall by another 87 patients.

Baker said the trend lines have moved "a little bit in the right direction," but he wanted to be careful not to try to rush a reopening of businesses and relaxation of safety precautions in a way that would risk a resurgence.

"By reopening, we could actually create another fire and be dealing with this thing all over again at some point shortly down the road," Baker said. "When we reopen we want to do it based on the right data at the right time with the right mechanisms in place to monitor this so we only have to do this once. Because the calamity and economic hardship associated with it is absolutely not something any of us wants to have to put up with again."

The state's testing efforts continue to expand as well.

The DPH reported 13,989 new tests conducted in Friday's daily report, which was the second highest total ever recorded for a single-day.

Baker said as part of his administration's testing program, the partnership between Quest Diagnostics and the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers to send 1,700

testing kits daily to these provider organizations had been expanded from the 12 initial centers to include five more.

Lynn Community Health Center, Holyoke Health Center, North Shore Community Health Center, South Boston Community Health Center, and Community Health Center of Franklin County will now be receiving kits from Quest to test patients.

Sue Joss, the CEO of Brockton Neighborhood Health Center, said her center has tested 2,341 patients, and found 837 cases for a positive rate twice the state average. Brockton has been identified as one of the hotspots for coronavirus in the state, along with other cities like Chelsea, and Joss said that made it clear to her that the center needed to be doing more testing.

Brockton Neighborhood Health was one of the initial 12 centers to benefit from the Quest partnership, and it opened a community-wide testing site for a dry run on Friday on the grounds of Brockton High School.

Joss said the plan is to start with 150 tests a day, and ramp up to 400 a day.

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