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Dear Trusted Partners in Public Health,

The New Bedford Health Department strives to prevent the spread of infectious disease and promote safe health practices to protect the health and wellness of residents throughout Greater New Bedford. With that in mind, and in response to recent inquiries, here is a reminder on isolation and prevention guidelines for respiratory illnesses. Currently, the City of New Bedford is experiencing increased transmission of respiratory illnesses including COVID-19, Influenza, and RSV. While this level of transmission is consistent with seasonal fluctuations and current trends throughout the Commonwealth, as a measure to further prevent the spread of disease, the New Bedford Health Department recommends the following measures be taken into consideration.

- **Handwashing** continues to be one of the best ways to prevent the spread of respiratory infections.¹ To prevent the spread of germs, promote handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Key times to wash hands are: Before, during, and after preparing food; Before and after eating and caring for someone who is sick; After using the restroom, changing diapers, or caring for oneself during illness.
- **Order at-home COVID-19 tests** today through COVIDTests.gov or by phone at 1-800-232-0233 (TTY 1-888-720-7489). Promote testing if symptoms such as fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, head and/or body aches, loss of taste or smell present. If an exposure or positive test is recorded, please see current guidelines for isolation and exposure below. Testing is recommended if you develop any symptoms of COVID-19 or 5 days following a known close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Several options for COVID-19 testing are available in southeastern Massachusetts and can be found at [Mass.gov/covid-19-testing](https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-testing).
- **Get Vaccinated.** Immunizations are available for all three fall and winter respiratory diseases. Individuals can find local pharmacies offering COVID-19 vaccines by entering their zip code at: [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov). The New Bedford Health Department offers COVID-19 vaccines to qualifying individuals without insurance through the Massachusetts COVID-19 Vaccine Bridge Access Program. To schedule an on-site or in-home appointment with the New Bedford Health Department, call the department's main line, 508-991-6199, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday to Friday.
- **Wear a mask** in indoor public places. Masking is a low-cost and effective way to prevent or reduce the spread of infectious diseases. Children 2 years and older can wear masks to protect themselves and others. Considerations for specific groups of people should be taken, as people who are older, have certain medical conditions, and who are pregnant are at a greater risk for severe illness.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Infection (CDC). (2022) Keep Hands Clean. CDC. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (www.CDC.gov)

² Mass.gov (2024) COVID-19 Isolation and Exposure Guidelines for the General Public. Department of Public Health. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (www.Mass.gov)

Guidelines for COVID-19 Isolation and Exposure²

Isolation (Positive Test): Individuals able to wear a mask.

- Stay home for a minimum of 5 days, as the infectious period is likely to be most prominent during this time.
- If no symptoms presented or symptoms improved during this timeframe, isolation may end on day 6.
- Continue to wear a mask around others for 10 days (including in the household). The mask may be removed on day 11 with two negative tests taken 48 hours apart, (day 9 and day 11).
- If you need to leave isolation to seek medical care or treatment, wear a mask and practice handwashing with soap and water.

Isolation (Positive Test): Individuals unable to wear a mask.

- Stay home and isolate for 10 days.
- If no symptoms presented or symptoms improved during this timeframe, isolation may end on day 11.
- If you need to leave isolation to seek medical care or treatment, wear a mask and practice handwashing with soap and water.

Please note that school-aged children and staff who present a positive test must follow the isolation requirements and may return to school on day 6 or day 11, dependent on masking ability and symptom status.


Guidelines for Exposure

Isolation is not required for a confirmed exposure however, masking is recommended for 10 days after. If symptoms present after a confirmed exposure, take a test to confirm COVID-19 infection. If the test presents a positive result, follow the recommended isolation guidelines.

Yours in health,



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