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With Hospitalization Rate Rising, Public Health Leaders Call on Gov. Baker to Limit Indoor Gatherings to Curb Spread of COVID-19

More than 17,000 MA Residents Have Died, Variants on the Rise

Boston, MA – Today, the Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) called on Governor Baker to take action in light of the rising rates of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations in the Commonwealth. On March 18, the organization and 28 other members of the Task Force on Coronavirus & Equity sent Governor Charlie Baker an [open letter](#), urging him to maintain indoor capacity limits in order to curb the rising rates of COVID-19 infection and hospitalization in Massachusetts. They have received no response.

“It has been a little more than a month since Governor Baker increased restaurant capacity to 100% and reopened many other indoor venues,” said MPHA Executive Director Carlene Pavlos. “Since then, we have seen a steady increase in the infection rate in Massachusetts. Now, we are seeing the next predictable outcome – an increase in the rate of hospitalizations.”

Between March 1 and April 1, daily COVID cases increased from an average of 1,446 to 2,014, an increase of almost 40 percent. Yesterday, there were 2,292 new confirmed cases.

The hospitalization rate declined in the first few weeks of March. On March 22, it reached the lowest point of the month, when the seven day average of people hospitalized in Massachusetts was 599.4. Since then, it has risen steadily. On April 6, the seven day average of people hospitalized in Massachusetts was 713, an increase of nearly 20 percent. Yesterday, there were 755 people hospitalized for COVID-19.

“Yesterday, Massachusetts passed a tragic milestone, with more than 17,000 residents dead from COVID-19. Due to premature reopening policies, our residents must brace for yet more,” continued Pavlos. “Things are not back to normal, and we urge the Governor to once again implement public health measures that reflect that reality.”

Governor Baker’s decision to lift many indoor restrictions in Massachusetts has coincided with the arrival and spread of more infectious variants of COVID-19, including the B.1.17 variant (first identified in the United Kingdom), the B.1.351 variant (first identified in South Africa) and the P.1 variant (first identified in Brazil). B.1.17 is now the most common variant in Massachusetts, and it is approximately 70 percent more transmissible and 60 percent more deadly.

In addition, the method to Massachusetts now has more reported cases of the P.1 variant than any other state in the U.S. The Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard recently released data on 54 cases of the P1

variant, many of which were traced to a recent outbreak on Cape Cod. The report noted that the P.1 variant has rapidly increased in frequency since its first detection in Massachusetts on March 16th.

“We are currently in a race between the vaccines and the variants,” said Pavlos. “To defeat these more infectious and aggressive variants, we need to vaccinate a high percentage of our population while keeping infection rates low. If we are to win this race, the Governor must reduce the spread by implementing indoor dining capacity limits and other limits on indoor venues. Without these public health measures, even more innocent lives will be needlessly lost.”

The Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) is a nonprofit organization that promotes a healthy Massachusetts through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition building. We are leaders in the movement to create health equity by addressing the root causes of health and wellness. We promote policies that impact the major drivers of health outcomes, such as access to healthy food, safe affordable housing, and transportation. We also advocate for equitable public health services throughout the Commonwealth. To learn more, visit www.mapublichealth.org. ###