Coronavirus (COVID-19) Situation Awareness Report

Monday, March 30, 2020

DOES THE CORONAVIRUS SPREAD BY AIR?: The virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks. These droplets are too heavy to hang in the air. They quickly fall on floors or surfaces. You can be infected by breathing in the virus if you are within 3 feet, 3 inches (1 meter) of a person who has COVID-19, or by touching a contaminated surface and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the global, national, state, and City Declaration of Emergency remain in effect and will until further notice.


The Easthampton Health Department has signed onto a regional public health nursing program through the Northampton Health Department. Funds for this program have come to Easthampton through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The Northampton Health Department has hired several full-time public health nurses to assist cities and towns who do not have the capacity to conduct the required contact investigations for COVID-19 cases. By signing onto this program, we can ensure our cases are being thoroughly investigated and followed up on in a timely manner.


SIGN UP for texts with official state information, assistance and volunteering opportunities by texting COVIDMA to 888-777. Recent links include:

- AlertsMA: Have you or someone you know lost their job due to COVID-19? Sign up for a virtual town hall on unemployment benefits mass.gov/covid-dw2z
- AlertsMA: MA launched a new online tool, Buoy, to help residents assess their symptoms & find the right care. Access this free tool www.buoy.com/mass
- AlertsMA: Are you a healthcare or public health professional who wants to volunteer to help MA respond to COVID-19? Apply www.mass.gov/covid-hhek
- AlertsMA: Massachusetts tax filing date has been pushed back to July 15th from April 15th; same as the Federal filing date.

FIND LIST OF COVID-19 RESOURCES AT THE END OF THIS REPORT

VITAL INFORMATION BY CITY FUNCTION:

**Easthampton Municipal Government**
For continuity, core City operations and services are in place through this Declaration of Emergency. City employees are checking emails and voicemails as frequently as possible. The majority of City employees are working remotely or on a limited schedule. During the Declaration of Emergency, emails and calls directly related to COVID-19 are answered first. Direct urgent inquiries to mayor@easthamptonma.gov or 413-529-1400 ext 143.

**All non-essential committee meetings are postponed through April 7, 2020.** There is important work happening within City boards and committees all the time. We understand that this may be inconvenient for some, or potentially slow projects and discussions temporarily. Attorney General Healey provided new Open Meeting Law for essential city business found here: https://www.mass.gov/the-open-meeting-law

**Easthampton Public Buildings**

Only essential or on-call staff have access to public buildings until further notice. Essential staff conducts municipal government functions that are only and regularly possible on-site. On-call staff intermittently access public buildings to conduct the municipal government functions of their job not possible remotely.

This restriction is to curb infection for all staff, the public, and our essential/on-call employees. Exceptions to this mandate are police and fire, DPW water/sewer, highway, and wastewater crews with staggered staffing patterns and outdoor work in the park and recreation department. Other than these exceptions, no employee is allowed to access public buildings without the Board of Health and the Mayor's approval.

All public buildings remain closed to the general public – this includes schools, the Council on Aging, and parks. Only the Public Safety Complex lobby at 32 Payson Avenue is an accessible area to the public. Public contact with Dispatch will be via the lobby phone. Drug drop off, and firearms licensing processing are suspended until further notice. Additionally, the sharps dispensary container is in the lobby.

City Hall has new access protocols. All outside doors have been re-keyed and a fob system has been installed as of today. The protocols ensure city business that must occur within City Hall can be scheduled and track to further mitigate COVID-19 spread.

**Mayor's Office**
During uncertain times, planning allows us some surety and awareness of what resources we have and what we may need to react to a very fluid state of affairs. The Mayor is working with each City Department to develop an elongated operations plan through May 6, 2020.

Both email (mayor@easthamptonma.gov) and voice mail (413-529-1400, ext.146) are being monitored with COVID-19 urgent matters prioritized. Send press inquiries to the Mayor's Office.

Email mayor@easthamptonma.gov with offers of local help in the form of goods or volunteer hours. The Mayor's office is trying to connect offers with community resources for small businesses, food, and housing-related payments. We are gathering this information to match what is needed and where and the length of assistance. We do not want to overwhelm agencies providing services with the help that does not match their needs.

Also, high-risk groups like seniors and those with underlying health conditions are the priority. It is not every volunteer who can serve high-risk residents. Volunteers are a long-standing need in the coming months.

Audit

The Auditor and Assistant Auditor are maintaining all financial functions remotely. Additionally, they are creating accounts to track and receive emergency funds so the City can submit for COVID19 reimbursements as soon as possible.

Building Inspection

Under the Governor’s Orders, construction is an essential business. Construction projects must adhere to updated public health and social distancing guidelines in order to continue. These guidelines apply to public infrastructure projects including the outfall pipe repair, the new school, Ferry Street and Route 10 turning lane for River Valley Co-op.

OSHA has categorized construction as a Low-Risk occupation, the lowest of its four categories. For example, utility work typically isolates equipment operators, truck drivers, and laborers, all of whom work outdoors at significant distances. However, not all activities are as inherently safe.

Consequently, the City requires all contractors to submit a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) and Site-Specific Safety Plan (SSSP) for continued operations during the emergency declaration. For private building construction, the Inspectional Services Department is reviewing those plans and requiring additional measures as appropriate. For City contractors and utilities, the Infrastructure & Asset Management Department is restricting specific activities and has developed COVID-19 protection plans. For example, utilities will be allowed to work within the public roadway but will not be allowed to complete service connections that require property entry until after the crisis is over.

Subject to change, all inspections will be suspended except for time-sensitive inspections. The State Building Department allows for pictures for small project signoffs. For large projects, structural inspections are still happening. Please call the Building Inspection Department at 413-529-1400, ext. 128 with any questions about inspections.
City Clerk

Here is a link with information about the now May 19th special state election for the 2nd Hampden Hampshire Senate District seat:  http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/covid-19/covid-19.htm  Applications for either absentee or early vote ballots for the May 19th Special State Election may now be requested to be mailed.

This link gives some good info and includes applications, which may be emailed to City Clerk Barbara LaBombard at cityclerk@easthamptonma.gov, as long as they contain a signature.  
http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/covid-19/covid-19.htm

Multiple – member bodies can hold virtual meetings that are essential to city functioning. These meetings must follow the posting requirements.  Please reach out to the City Clerk with questions.

Effective immediately, Easthampton’s official public posting location is now the City website, www.easthamptonma.gov. Notices will still be posted outside the bulletin boards inside City Hall and outside the front door.

City payments for City Clerk, Personal Property, Real Estate, Excise, Parking Tickets, Water and Sewer can be made online at: https://easthamptonma.gov/online-services.html

Late fees are waived from March 13, 2020 until the end of the City Declaration of Emergency.

City Council

Governor Baker issued an Executive Order regarding Open Meeting Law and COVID-19. Per his order, the City Council President is working to enable remote participation by Council, Committee and Board members for meetings essential to the operation of City business.

Multiple – member bodies can hold virtual meetings that are essential to city functioning. These meetings must follow the posting requirements.  Please reach out to the City Clerk with questions.

REMINDER: At 6:00 pm, Wednesday, April 1, 2020 City Council meeting will be held virtually via Zoom Video. Access information for the City Council meeting may be found below and on the posted agenda at https://easthamptonma.gov/agendas-minutes.html

The public may participate in the “public speak” portion of the meeting by joining via Zoom or by dialing in directly via phone. You may also email your comments to any of the City Councilors who will read them into the record if you are unable to join.

TO PARTICIPATE BY ZOOM FOR PUBLIC COMMENT, PLEASE FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS:

For Video and Audio Participation:
From your browser: join Zoom Meeting from your browser by clicking this link: https://zoom.us/j/193725535

From the Zoom app and enter Meeting ID: 193 725 535

**For Audio Participation Only (no Video):**

From your browser: join Zoom Meeting by clicking this link: https://zoom.us/j/193725535

From the Zoom app and enter Meeting ID: 193 725 535

**For Audio Participation Only from your phone (no Video):**

Dial: 646-558-8656. You will be prompted to enter the meeting ID#. The meeting ID is 193 725 535#

You will be joined to the call in MUTE mode. Please remain on MUTE until you are recognized by the Chair. The Chair will unmute your microphone to enable you to be heard.

The Chair will recognize members of the public in the order of their call. Remember, we will ask you to state your name and the street or address of your residence when you are speaking.

As a reminder, during Public Speak, the members of the City Council cannot respond to any comments. This is your time to speak on any topic. Each member of the public will have a 3-minute time limit.

**Collections and Assessors**

**From March 13 through April 30, 2020, late fees and processing of property-related warrants are suspended.** The Drop Box is still available to the public. It will be emptied daily. Real Estate Taxes and Personal Property bills can be paid online at: https://unipaygold.unibank.com/customerinfo.aspx

**Department of Public Works**

The City Yard is open for recycling on the 1st and 3rd weekend of the month. The Yard is also open each weekend in April for lawn clean up debris.

Essential services – provision of water, sewer, and wastewater – continue to operate on standard protocols. Staffing has been split into smaller working groups, practicing social distancing. For non-life threatening DPW emergencies outside business hours, please call the non-emergency Dispatch number (413-527-1212) to report the issue.

For public and worker safety, DPW sewer staff will not enter a home when responding to a resident call for service.

**Dispatch**
Dispatch is operating with new protocols for 911 calls. Callers will be asking about possible COVID 19 exposure and symptoms. These protocols are to lessen the spread of infection and ensure first responders know how to treat patients.

All USPS mail, UPS, FEDX and DHL deliveries are now brought to Dispatch.

**Fire Department**

**Effective immediately**, the Easthampton Fire Department is suspending Smoke & Carbon Monoxide detector inspections in compliance with Governor Baker's Executive Order until 90 days after the State of Emergency is lifted.

The following conditions must be met in order for the inspection to be delayed:

- The buyer and seller agree, in writing, that the buyer, not the seller shall be responsible for equipping the property with compliant Smoke & Carbon Monoxide detectors and;
- The buyer agrees to equip the property per 527 CMR 1.00, Chapter 13
- A copy of the agreement shall be provided to the Fire Chief before the scheduled closing date.

For further information, please contact Deputy Chief Wayne Hennemann at 413-527-4200 ext. 2140

If you are seeking a burning permit, come into the Public Safety Complex lobby to obtain one. At this time, we are not collecting the five-dollar fee. If you have a seasonal burning permit, call the Fire Department to see if the state is allowing burning on that day.

**Health Department**

Based on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health issued guidance about local reporting of COVID-19 cases, this report will not be listing the number of confirmed cases in Easthampton. The number of confirmed cases, tests, hospitalizations and fatalities are best confirmed by the MA DPH. These COVID-19 numbers taken out of context severely misrepresent the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please assume that everyone, including yourself is infected for your health, your families and community.

The DPH guidance follows: "In order to protect privacy and confidentiality of individuals who test positive for COVID-19, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health only publicly shares positive case numbers and deaths by county. We understand that many boards of health find value in sharing community-specific data as part of a risk communication plan and to keep the public informed about the scope of the local public health effort. If you choose to share numbers of cases or deaths for these purposes, please do so with the highest regard for privacy and confidentiality by not including any information other than the case count."
Governor Baker has issued several Executive Orders to dampen the rapid spread of COVID-19. The Orders prohibit gatherings of 10 or more persons in a single room or venue at one time and shutting down all businesses unless they are considered essential. Gatherings of 10 are permitted ONLY if every person can maintain six (6) feet of space between them.

All COVID-19 case information shared by the City is confirmed by Massachusetts Virtual Epidemiologic Network (MAVEN). MAVEN is Public Health Information Network (PHIN) compliant, secure web-based surveillance and case management system for infectious diseases that enables rapid, efficient communication among local and state health departments and laboratories. MAVEN is an easy way to conduct case investigations and management while also decreasing paperwork. The system was purchased and developed in 2005 by Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and our local health partners. MAVEN is a tool that allows for near real-time information sharing between providers, laboratories, MDPH, and local Boards of Health. The system interfaces with electronic laboratory and case reporting efforts and is available 24/7 to support public health officials.

The Board of Health has the authority to fine who are not complying with signage, crowd size, and social distancing protocols as well as all other Executive Orders. **Fines begin at $50.00 and can go up to $300.00.**

The Health Agent is available via at beichstaedt@easthamptonma.gov Inspections at this time are suspended until further notice. All scheduled inspections are in the process of being rescheduled to a later date to be determined by our alternate inspector.

**Parks and Recreation**

The Park Office closed to public, please email parksandrec@easthamptonma.gov with question or help. Parks are open for passive recreation with the following rules:

- Maintain social distancing (6 feet)
- If you are feeling sick, stay home
- All Playgrounds are closed
- High School and Youth Sports are postponed until at least April 27th - no practices or games allowed
- The Nonotuck Park double gates will remain closed until further notice

The Easthampton Parks and Recreation Department will abide by all guidelines set forth by The Mayor’s Office and the Easthampton Board of Health.

**Payroll**

Information about City employee payroll is sent to work email accounts. If you cannot access your email remotely, please call Treasurer Jen Gallant or Personnel Director Bob Dickson at 413-529-1400.

Employees and veterans **who do not have a direct deposit** can pick their check-up at Dispatch at 32 Payson Avenue.
**Personnel**

Members of the public are encouraged to apply for positions now posted on the City website.

The only permanent job offers made during the Declaration of Emergency are to applicants who have had an interview before March 10, 2020. Interim and temporary appointments will be made if essential to City operations until further notice.

**Planning**

**Effective April 1, 2020 April 13, 2020 (revised 3/30/20)**

As a result of road work taking place, Ferry Street (from Emerald Place to the Manhan Rail Trail crossing) will be closed to vehicular traffic beginning April 13, 2020. The road is anticipated to be closed for approximately six months. A detour will be in place to redirect regular traffic and along with a separate truck route.

Due to the COVID-19 state of emergency, the Planning Department is not accepting any new applications for projects that require a public hearing.

If you have questions or would like to discuss a potential application, please email the appropriate staff person:

- Jeff Bagg, City Planner (Planning Board) jbagg@easthamptonma.gov
- Jamie Webb, Assistant Planner (Zoning Board of Appeals) jwebb@easthamptonma.gov
- Cassie Trager, Conservation Agent (Conservation Commission) ctragert@easthamptonma.gov

**Police Department**

In conjunction with U.S. Attorney Lelling's advisory, the police department warns residents of falling prey to these COVID-19 scams.

Massachusetts residents who believe they are victims of fraud or other criminal activity related to the pandemic should contact the United States Attorney's Office at USAMA.victimassistance@usdoj.gov or call 1-888-221-6023 and leave a message. Members of the public can also contact the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) by visiting http://www.ic3.gov/. If you or someone you know are in immediate danger, please call.

All on-premise consumption licensees cannot sell alcohol to the public until 11:59 pm on April 5, 2020. This order includes restaurants, bars, hotels, general on-premise, clubs, war veterans' clubs, continuing care retirement communities, pub-brewers, farmer – series pouring permits, and manufacturing pouring permits. On-premise consumption of food or drinks is prohibited; only takeout and delivery of food are permitted.
The current inventory of firearms licenses will be mailed via the U.S. Mail. New applications are not being processed at this time.

**Private Schools**

All private daycares, elementary, and secondary schools are shut down per the Governor's Executive Order at least through April 6, 2020. There are exempt daycare centers open with the focus on care for 1st Responder and essential staff’s children. The list of approved centers follows this document.

**Public Schools**

*To have meals delivered to students’ doorstep or if you want to volunteer to drive, please call 413-575-1565. Families who have meals delivered now are asked to call 413-575-1565 to CONFIRM the delivery to your house continues.*

Governor Baker has just announced the extension of the school closure until May 4, 2020 for all Massachusetts Public Schools. Guidance from the Commissioner of Education will be coming out this week for school districts to review. We are poised to work through the Commissioners guidance and adjust our plans as needed.

Please email or call. Do not come to the Easthampton Public School's central office or individual school buildings. School staff will be checking emails and voice mails remotely.

The breakfast and lunch program for anyone between the ages of 0 to 18 years, as well as Southampton youth, is at Easthampton High School, 9 am – 11 am on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. On each distribution day, families will receive two days' worth of food. On Fridays, they will receive meals for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

**Treasurer**

Payroll services have been set up for remote processing. Bank accounts and essential financial services continue on a regular schedule. As to date, no financial transactions have been deferred, given the financial markets and emergency banking protocols. The payroll schedule remains the same. However, if a Veteran or employee does NOT have a direct deposit, their check will be available at the Public Safety Complex in Dispatch. All other checks are mailed via USPS.

**Veteran Services**

Veterans who do not have direct deposit can pick up their checks at Dispatch at 32 Payson Ave. All veteran services are available via email (mayor@easthamptonma.gov) or phone (413-529-1400, ext 143)

**Council on Aging and Enrichment (COA)**

The staff of the COA is working and available during regular business hours to provide alternative arrangements for seniors who need access to essential services. The COA is doing wellness calls to seniors, providing transportation, and is working on a protocol for volunteers. For questions, call 413-527-6151.
Keep Informed through RELIABLE Sources

Please access these reliable sources of information for the coronavirus (COVID-19) throughout the State of Emergency:

CALL: 211 for reliable coronavirus information and resources

TEXT: COVIDMA to 888-777 and get coronavirus information on your mobile phone

General COVID-19 resources:

- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

Easthampton information:

- [https://www.uwpv.org/covid19](https://www.uwpv.org/covid19)
- [https://easthamptonma.gov/health-department.html](https://easthamptonma.gov/health-department.html)
- [www.epsd.us](http://www.epsd.us)
- [www.facebook.com/easthampton413](http://www.facebook.com/easthampton413)
- [https://www.facebook.com/easthamptonfire/](https://www.facebook.com/easthamptonfire/)
- [https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonPD/](https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonPD/)
- [https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonHealth/](https://www.facebook.com/EasthamptonHealth/)

State resources and information:

- [www.mass211.org](http://www.mass211.org)
- [https://www.mass.gov/guides/resources-during-covid-19](https://www.mass.gov/guides/resources-during-covid-19)
- [https://www.mass.gov/alerts/important-unemployment-information#undefined](https://www.mass.gov/alerts/important-unemployment-information#undefined)
- [www.masscourts.org](http://www.masscourts.org)