



Massachusetts COVID-19 Updates – May 22, 2020

- As of Monday night, DPH reported a total of 90,084 cases of COVID-19. The state has now confirmed a total of 6,148 deaths from the virus.
- House Speaker Robert DeLeo spoke remotely Thursday afternoon to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce from his office.
- The speaker's goals include finding ways to help child care centers stay afloat and navigate the new health and safety protocols when they eventually reopen, and coming to the aid of restaurants who are requesting permission to sell alcohol outdoors and get a break from interest on late meals tax payments.
- Speaker DeLeo said he would prefer to see the Legislature pass a "one-twelfth budget" for July, an interim spending plan that continues current funding levels for a month while lawmakers hammer out a full-year budget.
- Some experts have predicted a drop of up to \$6 billion in revenue, and Speaker DeLeo noted the possibility of more direct federal aid.
- Asked about tapping into the state's \$3.5 billion "rainy day" fund to cover spending, DeLeo said he was willing to dip into reserves, but not so deeply that it might impact the state's bond rating.
- Speaker DeLeo said it is the House's role to "foster, aid, and assist" the economic recovery that began on Monday when Gov. Charlie Baker rolled out a four-phased reopening plan and began to ease back from some of the mandatory closure orders that have ground the economy to a halt.
- Speaker DeLeo announced that he appointed House Majority Leader Ron Mariano, of Quincy, to chair a new Commonwealth Resilience and Recovery Special Committee.
- Mariano, along with Assistant Majority Leader Joseph Wagner, will coordinate across existing committees and with the administration to identify legislative priorities.
- The goal of the special committee, DeLeo said, will be to find ways to "mitigate economic hardship, minimize unemployment and job loss, and stabilize small business ownership."
- One area the committee might look at is liability for the health care industry, as well as business, schools, universities and other institutions as they begin to

reopen and search for ways to keep workers, students and patients healthy until there is a vaccine.

- Speaker DeLeo said a group led by Rep. Paul McMurry of Dedham that had been focused on find ways to promote the state's culinary culture had been ready to release recommendations in March, now it will repurposed as the Restaurant Recovery Commission.
- The commission, DeLeo said, will begin by working with local authorities and the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission to find a "solution" for restaurant owners requesting to amend their licenses to sell alcohol outdoors for better social distancing and safety.
- The commission will also be looking into whether the state should waive interest on late payments of meals taxes until restaurants get back on their feet
- The speaker also said he's asked Education Committee Chairwoman Rep. Alice Peisch to spearhead a new Early Education and Care Recovery Advisory Group focused on helping child care centers navigate new health protocols and find a financial model that will allow them to survive.
- Connecticut casinos are readying themselves for a June 1 reopening but an early July reopening is likely the best case scenario for Massachusetts gambling centers, which have been closed since March 15 and are part of the third phase of the Baker administration's reopening plan.
- The commission's interim executive director, Karen Wells, said Thursday that the commission is still reviewing the plans each licensee [submitted last week](#) and will provide detailed guidance based on the governor's reopening plan to each casino.
- In addition to the June 1 re-openings of Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun, which have each published [safety plans](#), including [Mohegan Sun](#) limiting hotel stays to Connecticut and Rhode Island residents only, the company that owns Plainridge Park Casino, Penn National Gaming, this week opened its 10 casinos in Louisiana and Mississippi, and MGM Resorts plans to reopen two casinos in Mississippi next week.
- Governor Baker does not share the same sense of urgency as the state's top elections officials and a range of advocacy groups about when officials must make a decision on how to conduct mail-in voting this fall.
- Governor Baker said Thursday that the Sept. 1 primary election and Nov. 3 general election are "a long way away."
- The MBTA Board gave final approval Thursday to a \$2.29 billion budget for fiscal year 2021, putting in place a plan to use federal funds to help

substantially increase spending while officials gauge the COVID-19 pandemic's lasting impacts.

- Members voted 4-0 during a virtual meeting in favor of the budget, which increases spending by about 7 percent over the \$2.14 billion fiscal year 2020 budget but alters plans for several initiatives such as scaling back hiring on bus expansion to grapple with a sharp decline in revenue.
- The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development said Thursday that another 38,081 workers submitted new applications for traditional unemployment insurance between May 10 and May 16.
- The office also reported 115,952 more claims last week for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance created by Congress to extend benefits to previously ineligible individuals, such as gig workers and the self-employed.
- Since March 15, the two programs have seen a combined 1.23 million initial claims in Massachusetts.
- If state officials find each claim to be valid, that would represent 32.9 percent of the labor force in March.
- Massachusetts is outstripping the [national trend](#). Nationwide, the more than 43 million total claims since March 15 would be about 26.2 percent of the labor force.
- However, not all states have begun accepting applications for the expanded PUA program, which has been in place in Massachusetts for more than a month.
- The Legislature sent to Gov. Charlie Baker's desk Thursday a bill dealing with unemployment insurance that would, in part, expand the maximum allowable benefit period for claims from 27 weeks to 30 weeks for any week where unemployment insurance claims exceed 100,000.
- House lawmakers [expected](#) to take up legislation dealing with COVID-19 data collection but further action on the bill was kicked to next week.
- The House meets again on Tuesday in an informal session.
- The Senate gave final approval Thursday to a package of unemployment insurance measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
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- In observance of Memorial Day the next daily update will be Tuesday, May 26th.