



## Massachusetts COVID-19 Updates – May 27, 2020

- As of Monday night, DPH reported a total of 93,693 cases of COVID-19. The state has now confirmed a total of 6,473 deaths from the virus.
- As some businesses get back to more normal operations and hospitals start to resume some non-emergency services, the governor said a medical advisory board he relies on has been discussing the possibility of lifting restrictions on visitors to hospitals and long-term care facilities like nursing homes.
- EOHHS Secretary Marylou Sudders said that she wanted hospital visitations to resume sooner, but that she and the governor's Medical Advisory Board want to wait and see how the first few weeks of increased activities go.
- State education officials intend to provide school districts with guidance on summer programming early next week, followed by a mid-June distribution of draft fall guidance to help schools plan to reopen in the new academic year.
- Restrictions on the sale of flavored tobacco products, including mint and menthol cigarettes, are set to take effect next week and Governor Baker said he sees no reason the ongoing coronavirus pandemic should delay that.
- The law restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products, including mint and menthol cigarettes, to smoking bars for on-premise consumption is set to take effect June 1, but the New England Convenience Stores & Energy Marketers Association has been pressing Governor Baker to use his executive authority to delay the ban for one year.
- Lt. Governor Karyn Polito denied an online report that she hosted a party at her home over Memorial Day weekend, saying instead she attended a graduation party hosted by her brother where the guests followed all the appropriate guidance on social distancing.
- Massachusetts courthouses will remain closed until July 1, but judges will start hearing more non-emergency cases by telephone, videoconference or other virtual means.
- Boston Mayor Marty Walsh announced the establishment of an economic re-opening taskforce.
- Worcester City Manager Ed Augustus and Worcester Mayor Joe Petty also announced the establishment of an economic re-opening taskforce.

- The Raise Up Coalition, which has been behind multiple successful ballot campaigns, [wrote a letter](#) to legislators urging them to raise taxes before pursuing "severe budget cuts" that it worries will worsen the impacts of the economic downturn.
- Some economic experts have predicted that anticipated revenues in fiscal 2021 could come in \$6 billion short of what had been projected a few months ago.
- The coalition argued that students, colleges, hospitals, public transit and direct care workers will need more financial support in the coming months, not less.
- The coalition said that deep budget cuts would be "exactly the wrong response."
- While it did not recommend any specific tax policy changes, the letter argued that large corporations "use loopholes to hide their profits" and "exploit tax breaks to avoid paying their fair share of taxes." Their letter is attached.
- The Massachusetts Lottery, faces "a significant threat of becoming somewhat obsolete" as the COVID-19 pandemic accelerates industry-wide shifts toward online and cashless interactions, Lottery Executive Director Michael Sweeney said Tuesday.
- Sweeney and other officials warned during a Lottery Commission meeting Tuesday that the agency's model, built exclusively around in-person cash sales and a driver of foot traffic and customers at Lottery retailers, may not be sufficient for the new normal.
- That could create problems for a major source of municipal funding.
- The Lottery last year [set a record](#) with \$1.09 billion in profit, which the state then distributed in local aid to cities and towns.
- Through the first 10 months of fiscal 2020, Sweeney said, the agency's profit is \$94.7 million lower than during the same stretch last year.
- Other states, including neighbors New Hampshire and Rhode Island, have allowed portions or all of their lottery business to shift online during business shutdowns that have marked the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While some convenience stores that sell Lottery products remained open during the outbreak, overall sales have tumbled in the past two months.
- April's net profit dropped to \$71.6 million, about \$22.5 million less than in April 2019, Sweeney told the Lottery Commission on Tuesday.
- Before the virus hit Massachusetts, the Lottery had been on track for a strong year.
- With figures updated to reflect sales through April, however, the current fiscal year is more than \$195 million, or 4.3 percent, lower than last year's benchmark.

- Sales have dropped across all product lines.
- As the wait continues for a fiscal 2021 budget plan, 91 economics professors are newly prodding lawmakers to raise taxes and to avoid spending cuts to make fiscal ends meet amidst plummeting revenues. Their letter is attached.
- The House passed legislation Tuesday (H4752) that would give municipal governments added flexibility when dealing with vendor services and during town meetings.
- House lawmakers also amended and returned to the Senate a bill ([H 4672](#)) that would overhaul the state's reporting on COVID-19.
- The House meets next at 11 a.m. on Thursday in an informal session.
- The Senate late Tuesday adopted ground rules for its second formal session of the COVID-19 era.
- A full formal is planned for Thursday to vote on multiple land-taking bills.
- The framework for holding a socially-distanced roll call vote will be much the same as the rules used earlier in May to vote on the governor's short-term borrowing bill.
- The newly-adopted emergency rules "will endure for 30 days unless otherwise changed or modified," opening the door for additional formals so the upper chamber can "take action on some timely matters."
- Big-ticket items still on the Legislature's plate: a bill stepping up COVID-19 data collection and reporting requirements, which has been bouncing back and forth between House and Senate with amendments; a \$1.73 billion information technology bond bill that the House passed last week; an \$18 billion transportation bond bill passed by the House in early March, which includes Chapter 90 money for local road and bridge projects; and what, if anything, to legislate in terms of mail-in voting ahead of this fall's elections.
- The SJC ruled Tuesday that Attorney General Maura Healey was correct to certify a proposed ballot question allowing more stores to sell beer and wine, clearing the way for the issue to go before voters in November.
- In its [decision](#), the SJC said that the proposed law does not improperly combine disparate topics as the Massachusetts Package Store Association had argued and ruled that the question passes legal muster. Their ruling is attached.
- The question, backed by convenience store giant Cumberland Farms, would permit more food stores to sell beer and wine than is allowed under existing state law.
- Supporters of the beer-and-wine question have until June 17 to submit 13,347 signatures to local election officials for certification and until July 1 to submit them to Secretary of State William Galvin's office to qualify for the Nov. 3 ballot.

- Liquor store owners opposed the proposal, filing the lawsuit with the Massachusetts Package Stores Association shortly after Healey certified the initiative petition in an attempt to get it tossed aside.
- They [argued](#) that the proposal's four main sections -- creating alcohol licenses for food stores, phasing out limits on how many off-premise licenses one entity could hold, imposing new requirements for verifying customers' ages, and increasing enforcement funding -- compose a "Frankenstein-like ballot initiative."
- The case echoed the commingled-topics argument that sunk a proposed income surtax constitutional amendment in 2018, but justices had a different court ruling in mind: they pointed to the SJC's decision on a 2016 ballot question authorizing adult-use recreational marijuana, which also contained "numerous different provisions" that they said fit under a single, cohesive umbrella.
- The progressive group Our Revolution Massachusetts is endorsing Sen. Ed Markey's reelection, his campaign will announce this morning.