



Massachusetts COVID-19 Updates – May 28, 2020

- As of Wednesday night, DPH reported a total of 94,220 cases of COVID-19. The state has now confirmed a total of 6,547 deaths from the virus.
- Governor Baker on Tuesday evening [signed](#) into law unemployment insurance relief measures that are aimed at helping employers and claimants during the coronavirus pandemic.
- The bill signed into law (S 2618) includes an expansion of the maximum allowable claims period from 26 weeks to 30 weeks for any week in which claims exceed 100,000; a provision exempting employers' experience ratings from impacts of COVID-19 and the current state of emergency; and lifts a cap on dependency benefits that currently stands at 50 percent.
- The House meets next at 11 a.m. on Thursday in an informal session.
- The Boston Globe is reporting that the House may take up a restaurant relief package before June 8th.
- The Senate late Tuesday adopted ground rules for its second formal session of the COVID-19 era.
- A full Senate formal is planned for Thursday to vote on multiple land-taking bills.
- Massachusetts' two newest state senators are slated to take office Thursday morning at a State House swearing-in ceremony.
- 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."
- The Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission confirmed Daniel McKiernan as director during a virtual meeting last week, moving him more permanently into the position he has held since former director David Pierce retired in the fall.

- Home sales in Massachusetts during April were down nearly 14 percent, although buyers and sellers wrapped up 3,706 sales agreements.
- According to The Warren Group, single-family home sales fell 13.7 percent in April, compared to April 2019, but the median home sale price jumped nearly 12 percent to \$428,000, up from \$383,000 in April 2019.
- That was the highest median sale price ever recorded for April.
- It was the biggest drop in home sales since April 2011, when sales slid 26.8 percent and the median home sale price was \$271,000.
- Sales drops were most pronounced last month in Hampden and Suffolk counties, where the volume was off by 30 percent, and in Barnstable and Berkshire counties, which were down more than 20 percent.
- The payment of unemployment benefits to some claimants may be delayed as the state implements new steps to verify the identity of applicants in response to what the Baker administration called a "national unemployment fraud scheme."
- The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development said Wednesday that criminal enterprises with access to stolen personal information from prior national data breaches were attempting to file large numbers of unemployment benefit claims through the Department of Unemployment Assistance system.
- As a result, unemployed workers may be asked to provide additional identifying information with their claims for benefits that could temporarily delay payment, the department said.
- Governor Baker's four-phase reopening plan calls for higher education institutions to each craft their own individual reopening plans.
- According to a [message](#) Worcester Polytechnic Institute President Laurie Leshin sent to Baker's reopening advisory board, the presidents intend their [framework](#) to be used as a basis for institution-specific plans.
- Massachusetts is in the first phase of its reopening process, in which colleges and universities are allowed to bring staff back to research laboratories and clinics.
- The presidents envision on-campus student programming resuming "on a small scale" in phase two, with social distancing and masks.
- Phase three would allow for "Careful, larger-scale repopulation of campuses...possibly in conjunction with the start of the new academic year," but only if public health metrics used to measure the scope of the pandemic continue to trend in a positive direction and sufficient tests and protective equipment are available.

- Phase four, a "new normal" of campus life, hinges on widespread availability of a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19, or herd immunity being achieved.
- The group's report flagged "flexible strategies" for moving students back into dorms in phase three, including lowering occupancy and organizing students into "households."
- To otherwise allow for distancing, it suggests moving smaller classes to larger spaces, using shifts or to-go meals in dining halls, and a mix of in-person and remote learning.
- The report can be [found here](#).
- Boston Mayor Marty Walsh hopes to see college students return to the city for in-person education this fall, but said the outlook will remain unclear for weeks as the state continues its progression away from the peak in COVID-19 cases.
- Asked during a Tuesday [press conference](#) if there was a safe way to reopen higher education after the summer, Walsh said he believes "it's a little too early to give you a full answer."
- The mayor, who said he has been in regular contact higher education officials, pointed to indications from Boston College officials that plan to be open in the fall and testing protocols that Boston University plans to roll out for its students.
- Many other colleges have not yet outlined their plans as they continue to monitor the spread of COVID-19.

SOURCE:

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