

COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE – April 7, 2020

As of April 7, 2020 there are now 15,202 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Commonwealth; 768 cases in Bristol County, and 9 confirmed cases in Rehoboth. Unfortunately, there have been 356 fatalities attributed to the virus throughout the Commonwealth.

When the Selectmen created the Rehoboth COVID-19 Task Force it was agreed the Health Agent would remain in close contact with the Board of Health and would serve as the official spokesperson on all Coronavirus health related matters and the operation of the Rehoboth Transfer Station. Public safety matters would be addressed by the respective Chief, and each member of the Select Board was assigned critical departments to assist in the development of a continuity of operations plan. The Chairman of the Select Board, in conjunction with the Town Administrator, is responsible for the coordination, integration and execution of the overall plan. Obviously, each of us relies on the others to provide the most accurate information possible so that responsible decisions can be made.

Yesterday, it became evident there has been a breakdown in communication between the Health Agent and the Board of Health, related to the reporting of confirmed COVID-19 cases within the Town. According to the Massachusetts Department of Health, the decision to release the number of cases within a city or town rests with the local Board of Health. The Health Agent provided guidance to the Selectmen's Office that the Board of Health would not be reporting the number of confirmed cases in Rehoboth. On Monday, the Board of Health Chair stated she was unaware of that decision and believed the numbers should be reported.

This obvious disconnect is of concern. As a result, the Board of Selectmen will be increasing their oversight of the Health Agent and the Board of Health. This oversight will remain in effect until such time as we are confident the lines of communication are functioning as they are intended.

To ensure accurate and consistent reporting, the Selectmen will include the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, as provided by the Town Nurse, at the

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beginning of each Selectmen meeting and figures will be posted to the Town's Coronavirus page on the town website every Tuesday morning.

With this said and given the nature of the virus it is essential we focus more attention on prevention protocols, than a lagging number of confirmed cases. Why is this so important? First off, for every confirmed case there are others who were exposed to the patient who will need to be followed. Some people with the virus never develop symptoms and others present very minor symptoms so it is impossible to say with any degree of accuracy how many cases any community has within its population. There is no true, scientific way to know the exact number of people infected with the COVID-19 virus in any municipality, city or state.

So, what do we know for sure?

- We know COVID-19 testing capability and accessibility has been on the rise.
- We know the town nurse is notified of each positive test result.
- We know each positive case is assigned to a medically trained case manager.
- We know the case manager is in immediate contact with the patient to ensure the individual remains in isolation and to obtain a list of anyone who has been in close contact with the patient.
- We know close contacts of confirmed cases are placed on quarantine.
- We know both isolation and quarantine orders remain in effect until it is deemed appropriate to discontinue such orders per Department of Public Health and CDC guidance.
- We know the case manager connects with those who may have been exposed and provides guidance based on the level of interaction with the patient.
- We know if you have not received a phone call from the case manager you have not been identified as a person who has been reported as having exposure to a confirmed case.

That's what we know. What we don't know is if the person you passed in the grocery aisle or at the gas station has the virus. So the best scientific advice we

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can give you is to stay home whenever possible. And, when staying home is not an option we all need to practice social distancing and wear a face covering when in settings that may prevent social distancing. And, remember to wash your hands often and for at least 20-seconds.

To share the advice offered by Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases . . . ***to remain safe suspect that you and everyone around you has the virus. Doing this will ensure you take the proper precautions to not only protect yourself but those around you.*** This is the only way to mitigate the spread of the virus in a public setting, since many who have the virus are asymptomatic or contagious before presenting symptoms.

Reporting a lagging number of confirmed cases does not make our residents safer, and could actually have the opposite effect by lulling residents into a false sense of security and cause them to abandon the very actions they have taken to protect themselves. Remember, the results releases today are, in most cases, from testing which occurred last week.

From all indications, the next 2-3 weeks promise to be very difficult as the expected surge of COVID cases descends upon the Commonwealth. During this time we expect the situation to get worse and we are asking everyone to double down their commitment to following the CDC guidelines. Now more than ever what you do and the decisions you make will make the difference in the fight to flatten the curve. Working together we make it through.

This Board of Selectmen will continue to provide weekly updates to our residents and we will continue to publish updates to the COVID-19 page on the town website as appropriate. At this time we remain fortunate; however, we must remain vigilant. We thank everyone for doing their part and following the directives and guidance offered by the CDC and the Commonwealth's Department of Public Health.