

Island Boards of Health and Martha's Vineyard Hospital CEO Urge Renewed Vigilance To Stop Further Surges of COVID-19 Infections

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Facing a disturbing trend of heightened COVID-19 cases – the greatest number, in fact, in a single week since the pandemic began in March – the Island Boards of Health and Martha's Vineyard Hospital (MVH) CEO Denise Schepici are issuing a joint call to everyone on-Island and those planning to come here to maintain strict public health guidelines to avoid exposure.

This past week the Boards of Health and MVH reported a total of 18 new COVID-19 cases on the Island, with 11 of those positive cases coming from hospital testing and the remaining at TestMV.

Contact tracing and case investigations are underway, with close contacts of positive individuals being quarantined and referred for testing. Although five of the new cases are linked to a cluster connected to an Island wedding, most are not. The concern is that the Island could be experiencing the beginning of community transmission.

This current uptick in cases should serve as a reminder to the community to avoid large gatherings, and always wear a mask when out in public when physical distancing is not possible.

We urge Island businesses and organizations to review their COVID-19-related safety protocols with their employees and ensure that physical distancing and masking is enforced in all areas including shared work vehicles, break rooms and other locations where staff or members of the public gather. If any employees are experiencing symptoms, please refer them immediately for testing and allow them to stay home from work.

Although Martha's Vineyard is not currently classified as a high risk (red) community for COVID-19 transmission by the state of Massachusetts (based on average daily cases per 100,000 residents), this current surge has the potential if it continues to push us into that classification. To bring this current surge in new cases of COVID-19 under control, we need the entire Island to work together to keep cases down. We urge everyone in the community to stay vigilant:

1. Avoid crowds.

2. When you are in public, wear a mask.
3. Respect physical distancing of 6 feet in between you and other people.
4. Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds using hot water and soap. Use hand sanitizer.
5. Be responsible. If you have COVID-19-like symptoms or suspect you have been in contact with someone who tested positive, stay home and call your physician.
6. Follow the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Traveler's Guidance. Individuals arriving in Massachusetts are required to complete the Massachusetts travel form prior to arrival, quarantine and be tested for COVID-19. This guidance applies to everyone entering Massachusetts from a high-risk state, including college and university students who will soon be returning home for the Thanksgiving holiday.
7. If you are called by a contact tracer, we ask that you answer those calls and be truthful and forthcoming about not only your exposure, but possible exposure to others.

“These high numbers should be viewed for what they are: a stark warning to all of us that we are not out of the woods and every one of us remain at risk for infection,” said Maura Valley, Tisbury health agent. “We need people to be vigilant about the protocols to avoid exposure and if they are exposed or receive a positive test, to cooperate fully with our contact tracers.”

“Everyone has worked so hard these past seven months to keep our prevalence low,” said MVH’s Schepici. “We cannot be subdued into thinking the virus is waning or is not a threat, so we need to keep up all our smart practices to keep us all protected and safe. Please take care and follow the guidelines. If we stay together on this we will get through it together”.