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PRESS RELEASE

Baker-Polito Administration Announces Higher Education Holiday Travel Guidance; First Round of Abbott BinaxNOW Covid-19 Point of Care Testing In K-12 Schools

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

11/18/2020

Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Department of Public Health

Executive Office of Education

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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BOSTON — Today, the Baker-Polito Administration released updated travel guidance to colleges and universities in advance of the approaching holiday season. These updated guidelines are focused on a robust testing initiative to reduce the risk of college students bringing COVID-19 home to their families and communities before Thanksgiving.

Students who leave campuses for the holidays should first receive a negative COVID-19 test administered by the college within 72 hours of their planned departure. Residential colleges should also offer COVID-19 tests to students living off campus that plan on returning home for the holidays.

Prior to sending students home for Thanksgiving and the upcoming holiday season, colleges and universities are urged to inform all students of the serious risks associated with going home before first receiving a negative COVID-19 test result.

Testing Positive:

Students who receive a positive test result before they are scheduled to leave campus should instead immediately isolate in campus housing designated for COVID-positive students.

Students in Isolation:

Students who have previously tested positive for COVID-19 and are already isolating in campus housing should remain in place until they have completed the 10-day isolation period.

Students in Quarantine:

Students who are quarantined on campus housing due to close contact with someone who tested positive should remain in place until they complete the 14-day quarantine period, as prescribed by the Department of Public Health.

Quarantined students may leave campus housing after 10 days if they do not have any symptoms and they receive a negative result from a molecular diagnostic test administered at least 8 days after exposure to someone diagnosed with COVID-19.

Return to Campus:

Students returning to campus from either within Massachusetts or from other states must produce a negative COVID-19 test result administered within 72 hours of their return to campus. Colleges should administer tests immediately to any student who returns to campus that has not been tested within 72 hours. Testing should apply to all students loving both on and off campus.

Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 Testing Initiative

Additionally, Baker-Polito Administration announced the distribution of the first round of Abbott BinaxNOW tests from the federal government that has been prioritized for use in K-12 schools providing in-person instruction.175 million tests were procured by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Defense and are being allocated on a per capita basis to states. Phase 1 of this testing initiative will reach 134 public school districts, charter schools and special education schools across the Commonwealth. Guidance was released from the Department of Elementary Education on Monday, November 16th and the tests are expected to be released by December 1st.

The Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 testing initiative is provided by the federal government and is a no-cost, voluntary program that will allow schools to test symptomatic students and receive test results within 15 minutes. These tests allow schools to identify infected individuals and their close contacts more quickly to help stop the spread.

Phase 1 is intended for districts and schools providing any type of in-person instruction, including full in-person, hybrid instructional models, or in-person services for high needs students. Districts and schools participating in Phase 1 have already been selected, and those chosen will have to meet six criteria, including the ability to complete DPH reporting requirements and ensure staff who administer the tests are trained. Schools must also obtain parent/guardian consent prior to administering tests to students.

The BinaxNOW Rapid Point of Care testing initiative offers testing in a school setting to students or staff that exhibit any symptoms of an illness consistent with COVID-19 as well as to students or staff who exhibit minimal symptoms (e.g., runny nose, isolated headache, isolated fatigue).

The Abbott BinaxNOW test is a rapid antigen test. Rapid antigen tests perform best when the person is tested in the early stages of infection with SARS-CoV-2, which is when the viral load is generally highest.

School districts seeking more information on the BinaxNOW Rapid Point of Care testing initiative should visit **https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/** (https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/)

Abbott BinaxNOW Validation Work

In order to test the validity of the Abbott BinaxNOW tests, the Department of Public Health (DPH) recently completed a study to compare the rapid point-of-care Abbott BinaxNOW test to the PCR test, the gold standard for detecting COVID-19. The Abbott BinaxNOW Ag Card rapid test is a simple, quick, inexpensive test that produces results in approximately 15 minutes.

DPH collaborated with Lawrence General Hospital, Boston Children's Hospital, and the Broad Institute to enroll over 1,600 individuals between October 26 and November 12 at the Lawrence Community COVID-19 Testing Center, a state-supported Stop the Spread site. Overall, the BinaxNOW test detected COVID-19 in 82% of participants who tested PCR positive in the study, an encouraging finding that builds the state's confidence in the accuracy of these new tests.

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Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito

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Executive Office of Health and Human Services

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The Executive Office of Health and Human Services is the largest secretariat in state government and is comprised of 12 agencies, in addition to 2 soldiers' homes and the MassHealth program. Our efforts are focused on the health, resilience, and independence of the one in four residents of the Commonwealth we serve. Our public health programs touch every community in the Commonwealth.

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Department of Public Health (/orgs/department-of-public-health)

DPH promotes the health and well-being of all residents by ensuring access to high-quality public health and healthcare services, and by focusing on prevention, wellness, and health equity in all people.

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From pre-school to post-secondary education, the Executive Office of Education works to connect all Massachusetts residents with an education that creates opportunities.

While Massachusetts' students rank first in the nation on many educational measures, the Executive Office of Education strives to strengthen the foundations of education reform, empower schools and educators, and develop pathways to college and careers so all students in the Commonwealth can succeed, regardless of their zip code.

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Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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