# Maine DHHS Launches Text Notifications to People Testing Positive for COVID-19

*December 23, 2020*

### As virus continues to spread, DHHS also expands public reporting of testing and case data

**AUGUSTA**-The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) announced today the launch of a new text messaging service to alert Maine people who test positive for COVID-19 of steps to take to protect their health and limit the spread of the virus, as part of a comprehensive plan to adapt Maine's response to the pandemic.

Beginning today, people who test positive for COVID-19 and voluntarily provide their telephone number to their testing site will receive a text message from the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) indicating that they should isolate for 10 days at home and inform close contacts of potential exposure to the virus. Recipients will also be directed to further information (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/coronavirus/covid.shtml) on the Maine CDC website. The message from Maine CDC will come from the number 22300.

As previously announced (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=3712532&v=dhhs_article_2020) , Maine CDC will continue to call people at greater risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19, such as older Mainers, health care workers, and people in congregate settings, and investigate their cases and notify their close contacts. All other people who test positive will receive the text message and a call from the DHHS Call Center.

"This text message notification allows Maine CDC to connect with people directly affected by COVID-19 in an additional way, helping them to take steps to avoid spreading the disease to others and support them in staying in isolation," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "As we enter the holiday season, it's more important than ever that Maine people remain vigilant against this virus to stay safe and healthy into the new year."

"This new tool will get information as rapidly as possible to people who test positive for COVID-19," **said Dr. Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Maine CDC**. "It should also allow their loved ones and other close contacts to begin quarantine as quickly as possible, which can help limit further spread of the virus."

The extra outreach comes as Maine CDC continues to process a significant backlog of test results, as announced earlier this month. Maine CDC is receiving a high volume of positive test results from the State lab and other labs, leading to delays in the next step in the process of assigning positive results to case investigators.

In recent days, the reported case count has increased significantly as 3,500 positive test results from December 10 to present are reviewed to determine if they are new cases. Not all positive tests become a new case, as some are from people who test positive more than once and others are out-of-state residents whose results are reported to their state of residence.

Today, Maine CDC announced that it is expanding its COVID-19 data dashboard (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=3712532&v=dhhs_article_2020) to better reflect these changes. Newly added to the dashboard will be visualizations of the molecular test positivity rate and more granular, daily data on the number of test results received, including daily positive tests. Combined with the existing data on new cases assigned for investigation, this expanded testing data more precisely captures the spread of COVID-19 in Maine as Maine CDC continues to process the backlog. The expanded dashboard is expected to launch later today.

For example, today Maine CDC reported an increase of 748 new cases of COVID-19. While this represents an all-time high, it includes cases with positive test results dating back to December 8 which Maine CDC has now been able to review and assess case status. The expanded data dashboard shows 561 positive test results reported today and a positivity rate of 4.28%, with both metrics gradually decreasing in recent days. Considered collectively, Maine's metrics remain concerning but suggest that COVID-19 spread is beginning to ease in the state.

Maine CDC currently has 135 people conducting case investigation and contract tracing and the DHHS Call Center has a total of 45 workers trained to help as contact tracers or case notifiers as needed for the short-term as Maine CDC brings on new people.

It remains vital that Maine people take steps to limit the spread of COVID-19, including avoiding gatherings, maintaining physical distance, wearing a face covering, staying home if you are sick, and speaking to your health care provider if you experience symptoms consistent with COVID-19, such as shortness of breath, fever, and cough.

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DHHS Home

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## DHHS Address

Department of
Health and Human Services
109 Capitol Street
11 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Phone: (207) 287-3707
FAX: (207) 287-3005
TTY: Maine relay 711

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