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Using Public Alert Systems for COVID-19 Communications

The COVID-19 Enforcement and Intervention Team (CEIT) has developed a comprehensive public messaging campaign to support high priority communities with persistently high COVID-19 case rates. The campaign includes several elements and tactics delivered through paid, owned, earned, and shared media channels.

Public Alert Systems, owned and operated by many cities and towns in Massachusetts, offer powerful communication tools to keep residents informed about the COVID-19 situation in their communities. Municipalities, particularly those in higher-risk categories, are strongly encouraged to utilize their public alert systems to keep residents up-to-date and to reinforce public health messages that will mitigate the spread of the virus in their communities.

Public alerting systems advantages:

Your local alert system is a trusted source of information for residents and offers several advantages, including the ability to:

- Communicate via multiple channels such as text, voice calls to cell phones and landlines, and email (some systems integrate social media messaging as well)
- Push messages in multiple languages
- Target messages to geographic areas within a community
- Deliver messages in formats based on resident preferences

Tips for delivering effective public alerts:

- Keep alerts brief; in stressful times, people have more difficulty receiving and processing information.
- Be direct and prescriptive; What is the alert about? How does it impact the resident? What should the resident do?
- Pre-script messages; see samples below.
- Have a trusted, senior leader deliver recorded voice messages if possible (Mayor, city or town manager, trusted community voice, etc.).
- Deliver messages in top languages for your community.
- Include new information with every alert and present the most important information at the top of the message.
- Keep a regular cadence of messages, but don’t overdo it – too many messages can cause message fatigue and lead residents to opt-out of the alert system (We recommend community-wide messages once every two weeks on Thursdays, the day after the Commonwealth updates city and town risk levels.)
- Coordinate messages: If other organizations (such as schools) are also pushing alerts into the community, coordinate the scheduling of those messages, so the residents are not getting multiple messages on the same day.
Option 1: Regularly Scheduled Community Risk Updates
(Click here to see these messages in Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Khmer and Arabic)

Sample Messages

Introductory High-Risk Level (red – level or worsening trend):
(NOTE: We recommend all communities use this message first.)

~90 Character Message:
COVID19 risk is dangerously high in (community) protect yourself & your family
Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

~130 Character Message:
COVID19 risk is dangerously high in (community). Wear a mask, clean your hands, stay home if sick, get tested. Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Sample Email:

Subject Line:

ACTION Required: COVID-19 risk is high in (community) – You can save a life

Dear Residents of (Community),

Yesterday, the Commonwealth released its weekly public health report, and it shows that our residents are currently at a dangerously high-risk from COVID-19. The rate of COVID cases locally is much higher than the state’s average. We need to do more to protect our families, loved ones, and community. You can save a life by taking action.

(Add a sentence with information about what is known from your public health team about the spread of cases in your community. Large private gatherings among family and friends without taking proper precautions? Public gatherings of residents not following public health guidance? Cases related to recent travel? Cases involving close contact with individuals such as carpooling?)

Please take steps now:

- Wear a mask when outside, or inside shared spaces where you can’t keep a safe distance from others
- Wash your hands often.
- Keep gatherings small – even with family and friends and make sure everyone wears a mask and keeps a safe distance.
• Don't share food or drinks.
• Stay home if you feel sick.
• Follow travel quarantine guidelines.
• Get tested.

For more information on how to stop the spread of COVID-19, visit Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

High-Risk level (red - but improving trend):

~90 Character Message:
(Community) is making progress. We must continue to stop the spread Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

~130 Character Message:
(Community) has made progress on COVID19. Let’s keep our progress going in the right direction! Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Sample Email:

Subject Line:

ACTION Required: COVID19 risk is still high but improved in (community) – Stop the Spread

Dear Residents of (Community),

Yesterday, the Commonwealth released its weekly public health report, and it shows that while our residents are still at high-risk from COVID-19 the situation is improving. The local level COVID-19 cases in our community have gone down recently but are still higher than the state’s average. We need to continue our efforts to protect our families, loved ones, and community.

(Add a sentence with information about what is known about the spread of cases in the community. If there has been good progress, let residents know what is working and how they can continue to help stop the spread.)

Please continue to take these steps:

• Wear a mask when outside, or inside shared spaces where you can’t keep a safe distance from others
• Wash your hands often.
• Keep gatherings small – even with family and friends and make sure everyone wears a mask and keeps a safe distance.
• Don't share food or drinks.
• Stay home if you feel sick.
• Follow travel quarantine guidelines.
• Get tested.

For more information on how to stop the spread of COVID-19, visit Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Moderate Risk Level (yellow – improved trend from red):

~90 Character Message:

Good work! (community) COVID19 risk is still high but improved Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

~130 Character Message:

COVID-19 risk is still high but improved in (community). Keep up the good work protecting yourself & others Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Sample Email:

Subject Line:

UPDATE: COVID-19 risk is improving in (community) – How we can continue our progress

Dear Residents of (Community),

Yesterday, the Commonwealth released its weekly public health report, and it shows our efforts have had a positive impact. The number of COVID-19 cases in our community has gone down shifting our risk level from high-risk to moderate risk. However, the average number of cases in our community remains higher than the state’s average. Our efforts to protect our family and friends are having an impact, but we need to continue the work to stop COVID-19. keep improving and keep our guard up.

(Add a sentence with the latest update about the spread of cases in the community. If there has been good progress, or something new learned through contact tracing, let residents know.)

Please continue to take these steps:

• Wear a mask when outside, or inside shared spaces where you can’t keep a safe distance from others
• Wash your hands often.
• Keep gatherings small – even with family and friends and make sure everyone wears a mask and keeps a safe distance.
• Don’t share food or drinks.
• Stay home if you feel sick.
• Follow travel quarantine guidelines.
• Get tested.

For more information on how to stop the spread of COVID-19, visit Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Moderate Risk Level (yellow – worsening trend from low-risk category):

~90 Character Message:

(Community) COVID19 cases are RISING. Let’s stop the spread Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

~130 Character Message:

(Community) COVID-19 cases are RISING. Stop the spread and protect yourself, family, and community Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Sample Email:

Subject Line:

UPDATE: COVID19 risk is rising in (community) – Let’s stop the spread

Dear Residents of (Community),

Yesterday, the Commonwealth released its weekly public health report, and our risk level has increased from low to moderate (yellow). This means our residents are now at a moderate-risk of getting sick from COVID-19, and the number of COVID-19 cases in our community has increased beyond the state's average. We can act now to stop the spread and protect our family and friends if we each do our part.

(Add a sentence with the latest update about what is known about the recent rise in cases.)

Please take these steps:

• Wear a mask when outside, or inside shared spaces where you can’t keep a safe distance from others
• Wash your hands often.
• Keep gatherings small – even with family and friends and make sure everyone wears a mask and keeps a safe distance.
• Don't share food or drinks.
• Stay home if you feel sick.
• Follow travel quarantine guidelines.
• Get tested.

For more information on how to stop the spread of COVID-19, visit Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Option 2: Regularly Scheduled Tips & Resource Messaging

Introductory High-Risk Level (red – level or worsening trend):
(NOTE: We recommend all communities use this message first.)

~90 Character Message:

COVID19 risk is dangerously high in (community) protect yourself & your family
Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

~130 Character Message:

COVID19 risk is dangerously high in (community). Wear a mask, clean your hands, stay home if sick, get tested. Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Sample Email:

Subject Line:

ACTION Required: COVID-19 risk is high in (community) – You can save a life

Dear Residents of (Community),

Yesterday, the Commonwealth released its weekly public health report, and it shows that our residents are currently at a dangerously high-risk from COVID-19. The rate of COVID cases locally is much higher than the state’s average. We need to do more to protect our families, loved ones, and community. You can save a life by taking action.

(Add a sentence with information about what is known from your public health team about the spread of cases in your community. Large private gatherings among family and friends without taking proper precautions? Public gatherings of residents not following public health guidance? Cases related to recent travel? Cases involving close contact with individuals such as carpooling?)

Please take steps now:

• Wear a mask when outside, or inside shared spaces where you can’t keep a safe distance from others
• Wash your hands often.
• Keep gatherings small – even with family and friends and make sure everyone wears a mask and keeps a safe distance.
• Don't share food or drinks.
• Stay home if you feel sick.
• Follow travel quarantine guidelines.
• Get tested.

For more information on how to stop the spread of COVID-19, visit Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

(Sample Message: Making complaints about compliance issues.)

~90 Character Message:

Know a business or workplace not following COVID safety rules? mass.gov/compliance

~130 Character Message:

Are you concerned about a business or workplace not following COVID-19 safety rules? Take these steps mass.gov/compliance

(Sample Message: Monitoring your health if you are identified as a COVID close contact.)

~90 Character Message:

10 tips on how to self-quarantine at home mass.gov/10tips

~130 Character Message:

10 tips on how to self-quarantine at home if you get a call saying you may have been exposed to COVID mass.gov/10tips

(Sample Message: Wearing a mask, wash your hand, keep a safe distance.)

~90 Character Message:

Save a life: Wear a mask, wash your hands, keep a safe distance mass.gov/maskup

~130 Character Message:

You have the power to save a life by doing this: Wear a mask, wash your hands, keep a safe distance mass.gov/maskup
(Sample Message: Testing)

~90 Character Message:

*Need a #COVID-19 Test? Find a testing site near you mass.gov/GetTested*

~130 Character Message:

*Do you need a #COVID-19 Test? Visit this website to find a testing site near you mass.gov/GetTested*

Promoting your Public Alert System:
As you begin using your Public Alert System for COVID-19 notifications regularly, take the opportunity to expand enrollment of residents to extend the reach of the system. Promote the alerts and the systems through various channels, including:

- Placing a registration link prominently on your city or town’s website
- Promoting similar messaging and the system on social media
- Issuing a press release on the COVID risk alerts
- Including an easy URL to sign up for the public alert system on COVID-19 materials

Additional Useful Messages & Social Graphics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Take these steps to report a business or workplace that is not following reopening standards and protocols. mass.gov/compliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get local COVID-19 updates and alerts delivered right to you. Sign up here [link to your sign-up page]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 Health &amp; Safety Standards Help Ensure Compliance: mass.gov/COVIDcompliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign up for our COVID-19 alerts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been told you’re a “close contact” of someone with #COVID19? Download our 10 Tips on how to safely monitor your health at home mass.gov/10tips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the best ways to protect yourself and others from #COVID19 is to wear a face covering. Find out more mass.gov/maskup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you need a test for #COVID19MA visit this website to locate a testing site near you <a href="http://www.mass.gov/GetTested">www.mass.gov/GetTested</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All visitors and returning residents of #MA must follow #COVID19MA safety orders. Find out more mass.gov/Traveler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 tips for home quarantine or self-monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wear a mask or face covering in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing for COVID-19 is widely available in MA!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting MA? Returning from a trip? You may be required to quarantine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Need help with food? You’re not alone. Many residents and families need assistance getting food during the #COVID19MA crisis. Find help mass.gov/FindFoodHelp

COVID-19 Communications Resources
Note: Shortened mass.gov urls can be provided for content linked below.

COVID Safe Practices Concern Form
This form is where residents can report concerns about non-compliance with the Commonwealth’s travel advisory quarantine, face covering, gathering, or other public health rules.
- COVID Safe Practices Concern Form

Infographics
- Stop the Spread of Germs
- Social distancing: for youth for general audience
- Coping with stress or fear
- What to do if you are sick
- 10 tips for at-home quarantine or self-monitoring

Short videos:
- Overview of COVID-19 Testing
- Importance of COVID-19 Testing
- How to Safely Cover Your Face Outside of Home

Overview of COVID-19 Testing
- English
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Simplified Chinese
- Traditional Chinese
- Vietnamese
- Haitian Creole

Importance of COVID-19 Testing
- English
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Simplified Chinese
- Traditional Chinese
- Vietnamese
- Haitian Creole

How to Safely Cover Your Face Outside of Home
- English
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Simplified Chinese
- Traditional Chinese
- Haitian Creole
- Vietnamese

- 10 Tips for at home quarantine or self-monitoring
- Stop the Spread of Germs like Seasonal Flu and COVID-19 (:30)
- Help Prevent COVID-19 with Social Distancing (:30)
- How Young People Can Help Prevent COVID-19 with Social Distancing (:30)
- Coping with Stress and Fear from COVID-19 (:30)
• Stay Home - Save Lives (:06)

Spanish Radio Spots (available on request):
• “Prevent the Spread of Germs,” “Social Distancing and Stay Home,” and “Stay Safe. Save Lives.”
• To request the radio spots, contact John Jacob at John.Jacob@mass.gov
Translated Messages

Khmer:

Option 1: Regularly Scheduled Community Risk Updates

Sample Messages

Introductory High-Risk Level (red – level or worsening trend):
(NOTE: We recommend all communities use this message first.)

~90 Character Message:

~130 Character Message:

Sample Email:

Subject Line:

(Add a sentence with information about what is known from your public health team about the spread of cases in your community. Large private gatherings among family and friends without taking proper precautions? Public gatherings of residents not following public health guidance? Cases related to recent travel? Cases involving close contact with individuals such as carpooling?)
High-Risk level (red - but improving trend):

~90 Character Message:

(Community) Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

~130 Character Message:

(Community) Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Sample Email:

Subject Line:

(Community) Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

(Add a sentence with information about what is known about the spread of cases in the community. If there has been good progress, let residents know what is working and how they can continue to help stop the spread.)

Mass.gov/StopCOVID19
Moderate Risk Level (yellow – improved trend from red):

~90 Character Message:

~130 Character Message:

Sample Email:

Subject Line:
(Add a sentence with the latest update about the spread of cases in the community. If there has been good progress, or something new learned through contact tracing, let residents know.)

Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

Moderate Risk Level (yellow – worsening trend from low-risk category):

~90 Character Message:

Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

~130 Character Message:

Sample Email:

Subject Line:
(Add a sentence with the latest update about what is known about the recent rise in cases.)

Option 2: Regularly Scheduled Tips & Resource Messaging

Introductory High-Risk Level (red – level or worsening trend):
(NOTE: We recommend all communities use this message first.)

~90 Character Message:

~130 Character Message:

Sample Email:

Subject Line:
COVID-19 \(\text{(community)}\) – J \(\Psi\) \(\text{kJ}\) Đē \(\text{nH}\) \(\text{Wy}\) IJ

(Add a sentence with information about what is known from your public health team about the spread of cases in your community. Large private gatherings among family and friends without taking proper precautions? Public gatherings of residents not following public health guidance? Cases related to recent travel? Cases involving close contact with individuals such as carpooling?)

Mass.gov/StopCOVID19

(Sample Message: Making complaints about compliance issues.)

~90 Character Message:

~130 Character Message:

(Sample Message: Monitoring your health if you are identified as a COVID close contact.)

~90 Character Message:
~130 Character Message:

(19)

~90 Character Message:

(17)

~130 Character Message:

(19)

(Sample Message: Wearing a mask, wash your hand, keep a safe distance.)

~90 Character Message:

(17)

~130 Character Message:

(19)

(Sample Message: Testing)

~90 Character Message:

(17)

~130 Character Message:

(19)