

## Virtual Opioid Task Force Meeting – Update May 12, 2020

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Dear Colleagues:

As we move into the third full month of the near-shutdown of Massachusetts and our own degrees of isolation, I first want to reach out in the hope that each of you is also able to take time to take care of yourselves. A recent poll by the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) shows that 45% of adults say the pandemic has affected their mental health and 19% say it has had a “major impacts”. During these times of uncertainty, each of us may be experiencing feelings of isolation, fear, grief or increased anxiety. As professionals, you know what to do for others - it's often hard to remember to do something for ourselves.

In addition to the resources on [our own website for people in recovery and grappling with active addiction](#), the [CDC has a page](#) dedicated to resources and helpful tips for us as caregivers and more generally coping with stress. As well, the National Alliance for Mental Illness or NAMI has a brochure with many resources, [located here](#). There they acknowledge realities many of us may be facing like feeling disconnected from co-workers, lacking a routine or financial concerns.

On the Commonwealth’s website, you can find [resources for addressing mental health crises](#) including these:

- Contact [Samaritans](#) 24/7. Call or text the 24/7 helpline any time at 1-877-870-4673.
- Contact the [Crisis Text Line](#) by texting HOME to 741741
- Visit the new [Massachusetts Network of Care](#) website to locate behavioral health resources in your area.
- Contact SAMHSA’s Disaster Distress Helpline. The Helpline provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.
- Contact the Massachusetts Emergency Services Program/Mobile Crisis Intervention (ESP/MCI) - 1-877-382-1609 ([read more about this program](#))

There is an interesting piece from [the Cleveland Clinic](#) that describes the importance of reducing stress to supporting your immune system. And the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has [an article on addressing and combating stigma and racism](#) that may - still- be associated with COVID-19. Finally, I found [interesting resources from the NAACP](#) addressing equity implications of COVID-19 from voting access to economic insecurity, to the disparate impact of this disease on our communities of color.



It is important to recognize that the events of the past several months may trigger different reactions in even those of us who like to think of ourselves as strong or who are viewed as healers or fixers. All of those reactions are valid and we can only be effective for our communities if we take a few moments to care for ourselves.

Since I last wrote an update, on April 18th, there have been 15 additional deaths [AS OF MAY 7th] by overdose to which our troopers have been called. As always, please bear in mind that this is not the universe of overdose deaths in Middlesex, only those to which our officers were called - this means that they were an unattended (non hospital) death. And of course for each of these deaths, there is a void for a family and community, made more difficult by the circumstances of COVID-19. Of those one person died by overdose in each of Everett, Framingham, Melrose, Newton, and Tewksbury; 3 in Westford; and 7 in Lowell.

The Commonwealth continues to produce [COVID updates](#) each day at around 4pm. As of May 11th, there have been 77,793 confirmed cases statewide and 7,979 deaths from COVID-19 statewide. Middlesex has had 17,589 cases. Their [dashboard](#) has detailed information about cases and hospitalization.

Many of our colleagues continue to offer wonderful programming to provide support and community for those affected by addiction and we learned on our Zoom meeting on April 29th that there are beds available for treatment provided a person has a negative COVID test. The [Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline](#) has a list of resources and links on its webpage, geared specifically for addressing COVID-19.

Our friends at PhoenixPrograms have [great virtual programming here](#) and as we heard, for our military families, [HomeBase](#) programs has moved its programming online as well. The [Mystic Valley Public Health Coalition](#) has a page of important resources addressing parenting, anxiety, vaping and substance use, and offering helpful links. And Drug Free Greater Lowell has a list of [on-line and phone resources](#) on its newly designed and just-launched website. There is some important COVID-19 and smoking information available on the MA Smoker's Helpline website here: <https://ma.quitlogix.org/en-US/Covid-19> . To access the information in Spanish, users click the tab at the top of the page "Español".

During this time, we need to continue to be vigilant and protect our youngest residents. Toward that end, the NASP provides [valuable information here](#), and for children who may be at risk, our office, through its [Child Advocacy Center](#) offers an online training on mandated reporting.

Our office continues to provide donations of Narcan to our law enforcement and community partners. For inquiries about how to obtain Narcan during this time, please contact Diane MacDonald at [diane.m.macDonald@state.ma.us](mailto:diane.m.macDonald@state.ma.us) or please call at 781.897.8303. If calling, please leave a message, messages will be checked daily.



We are planning the next virtual opioid task force meeting. It will be Friday, May 29th from 10-11:30. I look forward to seeing many of you there. If you have suggestions for content, please let me know. We continue to have success with our task forces only because of the active participation of the many community stakeholders who are doing the work every day.

Until then, please stay safe.

Sincerely,

Nora