



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health & Human Services
Department of Developmental Services
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To: DDS Families
From: Commissioner Jane F. Ryder
Date: December 17, 2020
Subject: COVID-19 Update

Dear DDS Community:

As always, let me start by saying thank you.

You have shown commitment, creativity, and patience since last March. We are in the midst of a second surge and you are again demonstrating your resilience during these difficult winter months.

At long last, the COVID-19 vaccination is on the horizon. With [the announcement](#) that Phase I of vaccine distribution includes residents and staff of our DDS congregate settings and home-based healthcare workers, and that Phase II prioritizes individuals with co-morbidities, **there is hope in sight**. We plan to share more information on COVID-19 vaccines and how they will be distributed across the DDS system soon.

At the same time, we are now experiencing a surge of COVID-19 cases across the DDS system, the Commonwealth, and the country. We are better prepared to counter the virus with surveillance testing, PPE, and infection control resources and support. We know what to do: maintain social distance, wear masks, wash our hands, and limit gatherings. As the virus continues to spread in our communities, **we must double down on these efforts**.

Before the Thanksgiving holiday, Secretary Marylou Sudders, leader of the Massachusetts COVID-19 Command Center, wrote a letter to our families to help them make plans for celebrating together.

You can find that letter here: <https://www.mass.gov/news/staying-safe-this-holiday-season-letter-to-families-of-those-in-long-term-and-congregate-care>

With the holiday season and a New Year upon us, I am asking you to again consider the serious risks that face you and your loved one. As you make plans to celebrate the holidays with your loved one, we encourage you to celebrate virtually or visit your loved one at their residence, in line with the program's safety guidelines.

Please be prepared for the possibility of a residential program limiting visitation if a resident or staff member tests positive, or the program determines that visitation cannot occur safely for you, your loved one, and their staff. Prior to any in-person visit, all participants should [screen](#) themselves for [COVID-19 symptoms](#) and are encouraged to get a COVID-19 test. Please check [Mass.gov/GetTested](https://www.mass.gov/GetTested) for testing locations.

This has been a long ten months, but there is a light at the end of the tunnel. We just need to get through the next few months. Next year, we will once again return to our traditional holiday celebrations with our family and friends.

Wishing you and your family a happy and safe holiday season.

Take good care,

Jane