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Dear DDS Community:

Just over a year ago, I sent my first “Coronavirus update” to the DDS community. We shared the Governor’s declaration of a State of Emergency, and the steps we were taking within DDS to protect your loved ones. We declared that health and safety of your loved ones is our top priority. No one could have predicted the ways the pandemic would impact all our lives.

Soon after, with guidance from our partners at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Command Center, we made some of the hardest decisions I hope this organization ever has to make, including suspending in-person visitation and closing day programs to in-person services. Like the rest of the world, when the virus first hit, our programs didn’t have a reliable supply of PPE or the capacity to conduct testing at scale. That quickly changed.

With a strategy focused on testing, infection control, and PPE, we flattened the curve by summer 2020. We re-opened our day programs to in-person services with precautions and guidance to keep participants and staff safe. And we resumed in-person visitation, with outdoor and off-site visits starting 4th of July weekend, and indoor visits starting October 1, before the cold weather set in. When the second surge hit our programs as predicted in the fall, we were better prepared.

**Your voice was instrumental in driving and shaping these developments.** You let us know when our policies and protocols went too far – or not far enough. You shared your stories, ideas, frustrations, and hopes. Your thoughtful suggestions help us provide our programs the flexibility and guidance to meet the unique needs of each individual we serve.



Thank you to all who are active in your local Citizen's Advisory Board, our Statewide Advisory Council, and advocacy organizations like The Arc of Massachusetts and Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong.

DDS remains committed to hearing your voice, and keeping you informed and engaged as we go. On the pages that follow, please find important updates including Phase 4 reopening and vaccinations.

As always, please stay in contact with your Service Coordinator and Area Office and follow the Department on our website ([mass.gov/dds](https://mass.gov/dds)) and social media.

Take good care,

Jane



## **Phase 4 Reopening**

On March 22, the Commonwealth entered Phase 4 of the reopening process. To bring our programs and policies up-to-date with the latest guidance from DPH and the CDC, updated COVID-19 guidance has been issued for DDS programs around visitation, residential congregate care programs, day programs, and transportation. For example, fully vaccinated individuals (who have received two doses of either the Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines OR who have received a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, 14 days or more ago) are now exempt from quarantine. Please know that important COVID-19 protocols on surveillance testing, PPE, and infection control will remain in place for our programs as we transition to this new normal.

## **Vaccination Update**

With the start of the new year came an all-out effort to vaccinate our congregate care residents and staff. I'm proud to report that every resident living and staff working in DDS residential congregate care programs has had access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Nearly all the individuals we serve and many staff in congregate residential settings are now fully vaccinated.

Recently, Governor Baker made important announcements about the timeline, process, and eligibility for COVID-19 vaccinations that may impact individuals and families served by DDS.

- March 22: all individuals **age 60+** and **[certain workers](#)** are now eligible.
- April 5: all individuals **age 55+** and individuals with **1 certain medical condition** are eligible.
  - **[Certain medical conditions](#)** include down syndrome, asthma (severe to moderate), chronic kidney disease, obesity, heart conditions, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), cancer, immunocompromised state, pregnancy, sickle cell disease, and smoking.
- April 19: all individuals **age 16+** in the Commonwealth are eligible.

There are new ways to access COVID-19 vaccination appointments:

- **Preregister online** for an appointment at a Mass Vaccination site **[now](#)**:  
**[vaccinesignup.mass.gov](https://vaccinesignup.mass.gov)**
  - Tip: Answer yes to the first question to preregister on behalf of someone else.
  - All seven Mass Vaccination sites are accessible, with wheelchairs provided on site, staff designated to assist with mobility issues, accessible entrances, and accessible drop-off and pick-up. Learn more about each site **[here](#)**.
- **Call 2-1-1** or (877) 211-6277 to schedule an appointment over the phone.
- Use the **[VaxFinder.mass.gov](https://vaxfinder.mass.gov)** website to search for appointments at pharmacies, health care providers, and other community locations.

**If you need help planning a COVID-19 vaccination for an individual served by DDS, please contact your DDS Service Coordinator.**



## **Massachusetts Homebound Vaccination Program**

**In-home vaccinations are now available to individuals who are not able to leave their home to get to a vaccination site, even with assistance. These homebound individuals either:**

- Require ambulance or two-person assistance to leave the home, or
- Are not able to leave the home for medical appointments under normal circumstances, or
- Have considerable difficulty and/or require significant support to leave the home for medical appointments (including behavioral challenges)

Call the State Homebound Vaccination Central Intake Line (1-833-983-0485) to be screened for appropriateness for an in-home vaccination.

## **Travel Advisory**

On March 22, the Governor updated the [COVID-19 travel advisory](#) in Massachusetts. Visitors entering Massachusetts, including returning residents, are advised to quarantine for 10 days upon their arrival. However, **travelers who are fully vaccinated and who do not have symptoms are exempt from this quarantine advisory**. Please keep this advisory in mind as you make summer vacation and travel plans.



*Please see below for helpful links and resources:*

### **COVID-19 Vaccinations**

- Massachusetts vaccine information: [mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine](https://mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine)
- Preregister for an appointment at a Mass Vaccination Site: [vaccinesignup.mass.gov](https://vaccinesignup.mass.gov)
  - [Mass Vaccination Site Accessibility Information](#)
- Find available appointments using [VaxFinder.mass.gov](https://VaxFinder.mass.gov)
- [FAQ: Transportation to COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments for MassHealth Members](#)
- [Vaccine Appointment Guide](#)
  - [What to Know Before You Go](#)
  - [What You Need for Your Appointment](#)
- [Vaccine FAQ: Vaccine Safety](#)
- [Vaccine FAQ in multiple languages](#)
- [Massachusetts Homebound Vaccination Program Resource Guide](#)

### **Visitation Guidance**

- [Visitation Guidance for DDS Residential Programs](#)
- [Off-Site Visit Attestation Form](#)

### **Guidance for DDS Programs**

- [Residential and Congregate Care Guidance](#)
- [Day Program Phase 4 Reopening Guidance](#)
- [Human Services Transportation Guidance](#)

### **Phase 4 Reopening**

- [Reopening Massachusetts](#)
- [Reopening Health and Human Services](#)

### **Travel Advisory**

- [Massachusetts COVID-19 Travel Advisory](#)

### **DDS Resources**

- [Visit the DDS website](#)
- [DDS COVID-19 Resources and Support Page](#)
- [Contact a DDS Area Office](#)
- [Interactive DDS Regional Map](#)
- Follow @DDSMass on social media
  - [Facebook](#)
  - [Twitter](#)
  - [Instagram](#)