

## COVID NEWS AND UPDATES | February 2023

### REGARDING COVID-19

The Biden administration is planning on ending both the COVID-19 national and public health emergency periods on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023. This may mean some changes for you and your loved ones. While these changes may affect you, your local board of health is here with information and resources to help.

What does it mean for the emergency declarations to end? The federal government will no longer be buying COVID vaccines, tests, and treatment to offer at no cost, and that some extended services will end or reduce.



Mashealth enrollment increased during the pandemic, largely because the federal government required states to continue covering anyone who was already enrolled. Due to this, many who have Mashealth may lose coverage because of things like income or inability to prove the financial need for assistance. Children are likely to be covered through the end of the year, however adults may lose their health insurance coverage starting as early as April 1<sup>st</sup> 2023.

Those enrolled in Medicare do not have to worry about losing health coverage as Medicare is for older adults age 65+ and those with specific disabling medical conditions and is not changing.



SNAP and food assistance benefits are planned to lower in May 2023, which may mean less money for food. There are local resources to help if you are concerned or experience food insecurity. Please note it is recommended to call before visiting, and all are open on specific days and hours:

The Webster-Dudley Food Share: 4 Church St, Webster at United Church of Christ, 508-943-9171.

The Oxford Food Shelf: 4 Maple Rd at the Community Center, 508-987-1062.

The St. John Paul II Parish Food Pantry: 279 Hamilton St, Southbridge, 508-765-3701

Southbridge Food Share: 79 Elm St, 508-764-6583

Project Bread: 800-645-8333 (180 languages available) or TTY: 800-377-1292

[www.projectbread.org/get-help](http://www.projectbread.org/get-help)



Masshealth: 800-841-2900  
Masshealth TTY: 800-497-4648

## Things are changing federally, but Massachusetts is working to keep some provisions going

Massachusetts law currently mandates that those with health insurance will never have to pay for a COVID vaccine; Paxlovid (treatment for COVID) will still be free for those that qualify for the medication; and while the federal government may no longer be providing free home rapid tests after the emergency period ends, you may be able to cover the cost of home rapid tests through your health insurance, and PCR tests should still be covered by insurance.

Mental health and addiction treatment by telehealth, video or phone, with a healthcare provider will continue to be covered by Masshealth for those enrolled until at least 2024, and if that ends it will only then require one in-person visit once yearly.

There is no update regarding plans for masking as of 2/7/23; currently masking for anyone over age 5 who is able is still required in doctors offices, hospitals, clinics, and EMS. Masks are still required for staff at home health visits, residential care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, dental offices, and physical/occupational/speech therapy.



▶ Paxlovid is a treatment prescribed to those with COVID, given within the first 5 days of symptoms starting. Paxlovid is 5-day antiviral course of 3 pills taken twice a day. Studies show Paxlovid is over 86% effective against bad or worse outcomes. It can be prescribed to those age 12 and older with comorbidities or a compromised immune system who weigh at least 88lbs, or anyone 50 and older. The most common side effect is a metallic taste in the mouth that goes away once treatment is finished. Those with severe liver or kidney disease are advised not to take Paxlovid, and some medications should not be taken with Paxlovid. Treatment can be repeated with each COVID infection, and in South Central Massachusetts the closest clinic that offers visits-to-prescribe is CVS MinuteClinic in Charlton, which offers telehealth visits to prescribe Paxlovid.



▶ Monoclonal antibodies were previously given to those with early symptoms of COVID, given in the hospital as an IV infusion once a day for three days. Unfortunately, monoclonal antibody therapy is no longer offered as it has shown to be resistant and ineffective against the most common strains and have since been pulled from the market.

There are two possible after-effects of COVID infection that it is helpful to be aware of. Once someone has COVID, it is possible to get Rebound COVID and/or Long COVID.

- Rebound COVID is when, after you begin to feel better either by time or treatment, symptoms sometimes come back for an additional few days. Some may think they have been re-infected with COVID or some other illness, but this is what is known as Rebound COVID. Rebound symptoms are not usually severe or long lasting.
- Long COVID, also known as Post-COVID, is when someone experiences associated health problems that continue for weeks, months, or years, and that start or persist for 4 weeks or more after the COVID infection. This is more common in those who are unvaccinated or experienced severe COVID. There is no test or treatment for Long COVID other than treating symptoms. Common symptoms include brain fog, tiredness, headaches, fatigue after exertion, cough, chest pain, heart flutters, muscle pain, change in taste or smell, depression, and more. If you think you may have Long COVID you should reach out to your primary care provider as they may be able to help.