

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH



SPECIAL MESSAGE from the City Health Officer

Friday, November 20, 2020

**GOVERNOR SUNUNU ISSUES STATEDWIDE MASK MANDATE,
effective November 20, 2020.**

<https://www.governor.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt336/files/documents/emergency-order-74.pdf>

NH DHHS Dashboard: <https://www.nh.gov/covid19/dashboard/overview.htm>

Governor Sununu's Emergency Order extended to January 15, 2021.

<https://www.governor.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt336/files/documents/emergency-order-72.pdf>

As You Consider Your Holiday Plans

By Kim McNamara, City Health Officer

I am appealing to the greater Portsmouth area to do everything in your power to slow the spread of COVID-19 within our community. The virus numbers are trending in a very poor direction and all of us are at substantial risk of contracting the disease. From the start of the pandemic we have shaped our public health response according to the data. We know that information reported today reflects conditions that were true a week or more ago. Unfortunately, based on our understanding of community transmission, the actual infection numbers are higher and will assuredly be getting worse.

Each week the City publishes a "Regional COVID-19 Dashboard," collecting data from several sources including NH Department of Health & Human Services. (You can find it along with answers to Frequently Asked Questions about life during this pandemic on this page: <http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/health/coronavirus-response>.) Infections, testing positivity, hospitalizations and cases in Rockingham County and in Portsmouth are all increasing, and have been for many weeks. A fractional increase in data equates to a substantial impact on our community.

In your travels, not just your immediate family is at risk. Every member of our community is, as well. COVID-19 is a very sneaky disease. It is so highly contagious that it can still spread when everyone is doing the right things. But those precautionary actions can substantially reduce the spread and may lessen the severity of disease if you are infected. COVID-19 is debilitating and even life-threatening to some. For reasons not yet fully understood, it can have unpredictable effects on otherwise young, healthy individuals. It can spread without a whisper of illness. It has already caused great disruption to our community, and sadly, the loss of some of us.

Let's try together to keep it from wreaking further havoc here.

Now is not the time for complacency, COVID-19 fatigue, or "returning to normal." This is hard. It is a whole new way of living and I applaud all of you who have taken this on and done your part. It is not forever, but it is

the reality for now. We must continue our commitment to the personal responsibility that got us through the spring, allowed New Hampshire to mostly miss the “second wave” over the summer, and that might just get us through the winter if we remain vigilant. This community has risen to challenges graciously many times in the past and this is certainly one of the most important times any of us will likely face. Let’s all resolve to protect each other.

Unfortunately, many people are still considering inviting family members or friends over for the holidays, or traveling to visit relatives for Thanksgiving. AAA says traffic for Thanksgiving is expected to decrease *just 10 percent*. Even knowing that travel outside New England means you must quarantine for 14 days when you get back to New Hampshire has not caused enough people to recognize that this is the year we must change our usual holiday plans. Especially as all of New England is now experiencing substantial transmission.

We at the Health Department understand that people are desperately hoping to have holidays “as usual” and are wondering what they should do. The answer is simple, if unwelcome: “Please stay home, with only your household family members.”

Traditions are hard to break and it can feel as if the precautions and protocols will never end. But that isn’t true. As discouraging as this advice might seem, there is hope on the horizon. We as a community now know how to slow the virus – wearing masks, washing hands, distancing, avoiding others in public places. We’ve changed our normal routines to follow those guidelines. At least two vaccines are showing promise and a national distribution network is being activated. The hope is that we will see great progress with this soon and will be on our way to some relief.

But unless we all remain vigilant over the next few months, maintaining those same basic practices we have followed since last spring, we won’t turn that corner. The impact of the virus on the Seacoast will get much worse before it can get better. Instead of slowing it down, the virus will spread faster, with greater impact on our hospitals, our economy and our residents. It is not just gatherings of six that are dangerous right now, it is gatherings of two.

So, for the holidays this year, please join the Health Department in modifying our Thanksgiving plans: limit your contact to the people in your own contained household for this holiday season. In all interactions outside of your home, keep wearing masks, maintaining a minimum of 6 feet in social distance, washing your hands, and not congregating in close-contact, poorly-ventilated spaces.

Send your love for Thanksgiving, not the virus. Be creative. Send cards and letters. Send a Thanksgiving meal and enjoy it together remotely by video chat. Zoom is suspending its 40-minute limit for the day, so Zoom-share your dinner or recipe preparations with distant family and friends. Perhaps reschedule Thanksgiving to when you can all eat outside, or at least until the most vulnerable members of our community and your family receives a safe and effective vaccine. Do something else together outside this holiday, instead of eating where masks can’t be worn and it’s too cold to sit outside. Meet somewhere to hike, go for a bike ride, take a walk. Don’t stop on the way.

You don’t have to cancel Thanksgiving, or Christmas, please just celebrate thoughtfully so that all members of our community have a fighting chance to celebrate the season fully next year with our families. Give thanks that we as a community, largely due to our ongoing teamwork, have escaped the worst of this to date and by spring, hopefully things will have started to improve. We have reason for that optimism.

We are living through history. The end is not yet written and the outcome depends on all of us looking out for each other, as this community has done so many times before.

Do your part. Wear a mask.

For answers to Portsmouth Mask Ordinance Frequently Asked Questions, click here.

<https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/sites/default/files/2020-10/MaskOrdinanceFAQ%202020.10.05.pdf>

This week's Regional COVID-19 Dashboard posted here:

<https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/sites/default/files/2020-11/CovidDashboard111620.pdf>

The City Health Department also offers the following COVID-19 information:

For Testing FAQs click here. <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/city/testing-faqs>

For COVID-19 & Mask Facts click here. <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/city-manager/covid-19-mask-facts>

For Ventilation FAQs click here. <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/city/ventilation-faqs>

For Daily Life During the Pandemic FAQs, click here. <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/city-manager/daily-life-during-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

For this week's Regional COVID-19 Dashboard, click here.

<https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/sites/default/files/2020-11/revCovidDashboard110920.pdf>

ASSISTANCE RESOURCES

For Resources and Assistance with housing, food, heat, etc. click here.

<https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/city/covid-19-resources>

THANKSGIVING

SHARE THE WARMTH FOR GATHER -- Starting immediately, the *Alliance for Greater Good* hopes to collect enough new hats, mittens, and gloves for all Gather families who participate in this year's Thanksgiving food distribution event. **Donations of new hats, mittens, and gloves for adults and children can be dropped at the Portsmouth Senior Activity Center at 125 Cottage Street through November 19.** For more information or questions, email Lisa Vivinetta at Alliance.GreaterGood@gmail.com.

Gather Food Pantry: Gather provides food for the Thanksgiving holiday to hundreds of local families, and the need is even greater this year. Their Thanksgiving Distribution takes place on November 21. Food distribution, online grocery shopping for people who don't want to enter the shop, Meal delivery for Seniors, Meals 4 Kids, Community Fridays 9am-1pm open at Community Campus (open to anyone). Call for info 603-436-0641. **The annual Peas 'n Carrots food drive is by virtual donation this year. Online through November 30.** To make a donation and learn how far dollars raised will go in feeding the food insecure in the community, click here. <https://secure.givelively.org/donate/gather/pease-n-carrots-2020>

American Legion, Thanksgiving Day Nov 26, Noon-3pm. Thanksgiving dinner delivery within a 5-mile radius of the Legion (including Marjeson, Feaster, other housing). Also serving a take-out Thanksgiving dinner. There is no cost for take-out or delivery, but the drivers can be tipped. For delivery call the Legion at 436-7575. For takeout, call or just show up. The Legion will also have a few tables inside the Legion for up to 4 people each, first come, first served. Starting at 12 noon. Free.

48th Annual Portsmouth Rotary Thanksgiving Dinner, Thursday, November 26. Pickup between 11 am and 12:30 pm at St. Nicholas Greek Church, Andrew Jarvis Drive. No sit-down dinner this year due to COVID-19. For delivery or pickup, please call 603-828-4869 or email rotarythanksgiving@gmail.com

Operation Blessing: Drive up Food Pantry Wed-Fri 10am-4pm, **Thanksgiving Baskets.** Call for more info 603-430-8561.

- **Housing Relief Fund-** Governor Chris Sununu authorized the expenditure of \$35 million from the CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund ("flex funds") to support families or individuals in need of housing assistance as a result of COVID-19. Of the allocated \$35 million, \$20 million will be initially expended, with \$15 million being held in

reserve, for rent stabilization and housing support. Both the one-time grants and the short-term rental assistance will be coupled with regional case management services to help connect households to appropriate services as defined by the household and the agency. **Program payments will be made directly to the landlord or provider, and this program will end by December 30, 2020.** For more information, visit <https://www.capnh.org>

- **Help Paying Energy Bills** – Eversource offers a COVID-19 Payment Program that gives customers up to 12 months to pay past-due balances, without down payments, fees or interest. Once enrolled the account is protected from service disconnection for the duration of the payment plan. For more information call 1-800-662-7764 or visit <https://www.eversource.com/content/nh>
- **DEADLINE TOMORROW 3 PM Federal Stimulus Checks** – Anyone who has not received a stimulus check from the Federal government can still file to do so. The deadline is **November 21, 2020 at 3 pm**. If you did not file a 2019 Federal Income Tax return, did not receive a stimulus check and have not already applied, visit this IRS website to file your application: **Social Security, Railroad Retirement and Veterans Affairs Benefits recipients who received their Stimulus Checks but still need to file to receive benefits for qualifying children also have until November 21, 2020 at 3 pm to apply. Click here for details:** <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/economic-impact-payment-information-center-topic-h-social-security-railroad-retirement-and-department-of-veteran-affairs-benefit-recipients>

TESTING-- The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services provides this list as a service to the community. The Department does not endorse any particular entity for COVID-19 testing services. <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/covid19/documents/covid-testing-options.pdf>

For all the COVID-related resources, [click here](#).

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The State has also made changes to the COVID guidelines to minimize redundancy in each industry sector. **Those guidelines that applied to all industry sectors have been removed from separate sector pages and now live only in the Universal Guidelines (UG) pages.** In some cases (e.g. outdoor attractions, arts, music education, funerals, and more) the sector pages have been eliminated entirely and you'll find a note at the end of the UG specific to those sectors. Click here for the details: <https://www.covidguidance.nh.gov/>

For answers to other questions about the City's response to COVID-19, please email: hotline@cityofportsmouth.com

For more information, visit [City's page on COVID-19](#)