

UPDATE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



Stay informed. Take precautions. Stay safe.

Dear Members,

For those individuals who experience early COVID-19 symptoms and test positive for the virus, treatment is available which can help lower the amount of virus present in the body and protect the individual from severe illness. In a new service being provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, people may access free Telehealth service as a quick and easy way to determine if Paxlovid is a viable option for treatment. If you're eligible for [Paxlovid](#), you'll be connected with a clinician for a video consultation within 30 minutes. The service will arrange for pickup at a local pharmacy or free overnight delivery (if the prescription is written before 5 p.m. Monday – Friday). Clinicians are available daily between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m., 7 days per week. To qualify for this service, individuals must meet the following criteria:

1. You must test positive for COVID-19 and have symptoms.
2. Treatment must begin as soon as possible after testing positive and within 5 days of symptom onset.
3. You also have certain medical conditions that put you at higher risk for severe disease (including being a current or former smoker, cancer, diabetes, obesity, or others) or are over age 65.
4. You must be 18 years old or older.
5. You must be a Massachusetts resident.

Please use [this link](#) to access the necessary details for using this service.

In a message sent today from EOEAL Secretary Elizabeth Chen, ALRs are encouraged to ask residents the following questions upon testing positive for COVID-19:

1. Would you like me to help you connect to your provider to see if you are eligible for treatment?
2. There's a telehealth option to determine if treatment would be helpful for you. Would you like us to help you connect to the telehealth service?

Also included in Secretary Chen's message are the following **current best practices to prevent and treat COVID-19**:

1. Stay up to date on vaccinations
2. Use at-home rapid tests frequently, even if not experiencing symptoms.
3. If positive for COVID-19, isolate, and use treatments if appropriate.

[COVID-19 In-Home Vaccination Program | Mass.gov](#) is available for residents who have difficulty getting to a location outside your ALR.

You may access Secretary Chen's full message [here](#).

Acquisition of BinaxNOW Tests

EOEA has forwarded a DPH-issued guidance providing information on how to request BinaxNOW test kits from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), updates and clarifications to the situations in which kits requested from DPH may be used, and what documentation and protocols must be in place prior to requesting test kits. This updated guidance aligns reporting requirements with federal changes that only positive antigen results need to be reported to DPH's State Laboratory. The reporting of **negative** results for point-of-care rapid antigen COVID-19 tests is no longer required. This is in alignment with CDC guidance issued in April 2022. All **positive** point-of-care test results must still be reported to DPH through your usual process. The [guidance](#) incorporates this update and reminds you that BinaxNOW test kits remain available through June 30, 2022.

Please note that it is not necessary to report results, positive or negative, of rapid antigen **self-tests** (also known as at-home tests).

At-Home Tests

All health insurers, including [Medicare, pay for 8 non-prescription rapid COVID-19 tests. per month.](#)

BinaxNOW test kits requested from DPH should be used for the following purposes:

- for individuals entering the facility who are not regularly reporting staff (e.g. visitors);
- testing symptomatic staff and residents at the facility;
- testing asymptomatic staff and residents at the facility as part of outbreak testing;
- testing direct care staff prior to beginning a shift on a unit to which they are not assigned;
- testing staff who are not fully vaccinated, prior to beginning each shift. If staff are working two consecutive shifts, they only need to be tested prior to beginning the first shift; and
- testing for staff who feel they are at increased risk of exposure.

Requirements for facilities requesting BinaxNOW test kits:

LTC facilities must meet the four following requirements in order to request Abbott BinaxNOW test kits from DPH:

1. Have an approved CLIA certificate of waiver;
2. Maintain an adequate supply of PPE;
3. Ensure all staff performing testing meet training requirements; and
4. Report test results to DPH.

The [full DPH guidance](#), including additional details about obtaining CLIA certificates of waiver and further explanations of the information above, may be accessed here. Please note that, while this guidance is directed toward long-term care, all criteria apply to assisted living residences, as well.

If you have any questions, please contact us at Mass-ALA@mass-ala.org

**The information provided in this COVID-19 update is solely for general informational purposes to assist in understanding the evolving guidance regarding the current COVID 19 public health threat. It is not intended to be a primary public health or medical resource but is provided as a clearinghouse for or compilation of various guidance issued by official and related sources.*

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