

COVID PANEL QUESTIONS – NOVEMBER 12, 2020 WEBINAR

- 1. I read in the Citizen that Canton's red status is partly due to youth hockey. What does it mean to be a "hockey related" positive case?**

A “hockey related” positive case is a cluster. The Commonwealth defines a cluster as two or more confirmed cases with a common exposure, and recognized youth hockey as a cluster generator. This means, for example, a positive hockey player who passes the virus to a sibling, parent, coach or other players.

- 2. If hockey rinks are allowed to re-open, will there be any changed procedures implemented and enforced to protect against another hockey related spike in cases?**

Hockey is particularly vulnerable to spread of the virus because it is essentially an indoor activity where players are sitting close to one another in the locker rooms or on benches. Prior to the rink shut down, there was not strict compliance by all with the required safety protocols.

Prior to the re-opening of hockey rinks on November 7, the Canton Board of Health met with all hockey stakeholders including the Ice House, SportsPlex, Canton Youth Hockey, Boston Junior Terriers, Huskies and Canton Recreation to discuss how to keep Canton kids on the ice safely. Among the protocols agreed by all (and subsequently mandated by the Commonwealth) are Board of Health receipt of all team rosters to enable faster contact of those who need to be isolated or quarantined in the event of a positive case; mandatory mask wearing by all participants at all times; and more space to alleviate what had been crowded benches. The Board of Health has been, and will continue to monitor the situation, including with representatives at the rinks, to be sure everyone understands the new protocols.

- 3. Has Canton seen any change in hockey related positive cases since the rinks closure? Or since Halloween?**

The hockey related cases went down when no one was playing . Now the biggest cause for concern is social gatherings.

- 4. I am really confused about the significance of a negative test (for me, or others I interact with). How long should I feel "safe" as a result of a negative test result? Should my confidence in test results depend on what kind of test is administered? (antigen vs. antibody; self administered by putting a Q tip in my nose MYSELF vs. administered by a third party)**

There are three kinds of tests:

PCR test – measures genetic material. It is the gold standard because it is so highly sensitive, allowing it to identify an infected person whether or not the person has symptoms. Unfortunately, it is uncomfortable unless it is self administered (in which case it is less effective,

because those self administering don't tend to put the Q tip high enough for long enough into the nose to get a good reading).

Antigen test – doesn't measure genetic material, but rather, looks for proteins on the virus. It is pretty sensitive provided the person is symptomatic. Because it produces results quickly (in about 15 minutes) and is lower cost (about \$5), it can be used for widespread testing, allowing schools and businesses to stay open. The Antigen test is less sensitive than the PCR test and because it is less sensitive it will sometimes report false negative results.

Antibody test – this test confirms exposure because it detects antibodies produced from the virus. But because it is not yet known how long the antibodies are effective in preventing re-infection, this test is not particularly valuable at this time.

Significantly, a negative test is only good as of the time of that test. Someone in isolation or quarantine cannot reduce the period of isolation or quarantine by obtaining a negative test.

5. Rapid tests are now available in some airports, including Logan airport. Can anyone access them or just travelers? Is there a fee?

Airport tests are available only for travelers. At Logan Airport a PCR test costs \$75 with results reported within 1-3 days. A rapid antigen test costs \$200 with results reported within 15 minutes. Both online appointments or walk ins are permitted, though appointments are strongly recommended especially during the busy holiday season.

6. If I test positive, am I required to report that fact to any state or local authority or my children's school, or does that happen automatically by the testing laboratory?

The testing laboratory is required to report results to the state which enters all results in a state data base for distribution locally. That said, local boards of health typically learn sooner about positive cases from schools directly or word of mouth which permits it to begin its investigation sooner and isolate and quarantine those who might be spreaders. If you know you are positive, contact the local board of health immediately for instruction. If you own a business and become aware of a positive case (eg, an employee who may not reside in Canton) you must contact the local board of health.

7. I don't understand the "rules" for quarantining. When do I have to quarantine and for how long? Are some quarantines mandatory and others advisory?

If you are positive, you MUST self isolate for 10 days from the onset on symptoms or if asymptomatic, from the date of a positive test. Isolation means that you stay in your room, using your own bathroom and have meals brought to you where you eat alone.

If you have been EXPOSED to a covid positive person, you MUST quarantine for 14 days from the date of your last exposure to that person. Quarantine means you stay home, with no visitors, leaving home only for medical visits, and have meals delivered to you.

In some cases Canton's board of health may impose a "soft quarantine" where you are believed to have been exposed, and you are asked to quarantine until a positive test confirms the suspected exposure.

8. I've heard about travel advisories for those entering Massachusetts or Massachusetts residents traveling to other states, and they keep changing. How do travel advisories work, and how are they enforced?

Massachusetts' travel advisory has not changed since it went into effect on August 1, 2020 (though states considered low or high risk have changed.) Per the advisory, unless someone is traveling to Massachusetts from a low risk state, they MUST quarantine for 14 days after they arrive in Massachusetts or have a negative test within 72 hours of arrival. (It is ok to shorten this quarantine by obtaining a negative test after arrival in Massachusetts). There are currently nearby state testing facilities in Randolph and Brockton.

We are not aware of any enforcement by pulling cars over and ticketing. Though local police have the right to enforce these regulations, the state hopes that people will do the right thing.

9. I read in the Citizen about the break-up of an illegal dance hall on Route 138 where over 100 people were gathered. Did that event cause an increase in positive cases?

No, this particular event did not result in positive cases, though we are seeing significant community spread as a result of social gatherings generally. In this case, Canton's Board of Health issued a fine for violating the Governor's orders limiting the number of people who can safely gather and for not requiring masks.

10. I have heard that the schools have been very successful in getting kids to wear masks while in school. Why do I see so many school age kids without masks out of school?

There has been excellent mask compliance in schools, resulting in very little school spread state wide. Mask wearing is key to keeping schools open and allowing activities for kids we know they need and crave. After-school compliance has been very uneven, probably due to normal adolescent behavior and feelings of invincibility. We need a community culture that keeps reinforcing to our kids the necessity of mask wearing as the best line of defense to protect themselves, their friends, their families and all the activities they want to return to.

Mask types:

N-95 respirator mask – most effective

Surgical mask – next most effective

Cloth mask of 2-3 layers – next most effective (more effective if combined with a surgical mask)

Gator/bandana mask – NOT effective

11. The Governor just announced a stay at home advisory. Is that the same as a curfew? Will it be enforced by state or local authorities?

The Governor's stay at home announcement is an advisory, not an enforceable curfew. But businesses that are ordered closed by a particular time **MUST** close or be subject to local fines. This advisory seems to be targeted at young people who may otherwise socialize late at night at restaurants or bars.

12. The Governor also announced a mask mandate in all public places, outside as well as inside, with fines up to \$300 to be enforced by the local board of health and assisted by local police. Is that happening in Canton? Will people be warned before they are fined? Can parents be fined for their children's failure to wear a mask in a public place?

Canton's Board of Health recently decided to increase surveillance and enforcement of mask wearing requirements, with emphasis on businesses that require local permits. This will include, for example, local restaurants and rinks. There is no intention to target individuals on the street.

13. There are electronic signs over Massachusetts highways telling people that carpooling with non family members requires a mask. Can local or state police stop a car and issue a ticket if they see people are not wearing masks? Is this like police stopping a car for people using their cell phones or not wearing seat belts?

We are not aware of local or state police stopping cars to check for mask wearing. But this is now a requirement, put into effect when the hockey rinks re-opened because of the belief that hockey related carpooling was a driver of community spread.

14. There are multiple reports that we are not seeing school transmission. Does this mean that we could possibly return to students being in school for more than 2 days per week?

It is true that there is no school based transmission in Canton ~~or statewide~~. And the Governor is encouraging in-classroom instruction to the extent safe. We agree that in-classroom instruction is best for students and teachers and will continue to explore all options to increase it. But in addition to the science (and we certainly know more today than when our systems and safety protocols were first designed last summer) there are also significant logistics considerations: transportation, staffing, the number of close contacts that would be implicated by a positive case, mask breaks, lunch time and spacing between classroom desks.

15. There is a Governor's advisory that there should be no indoor gathering of more than 10 people. Does it matter whether or not the people are related? Or for how long they are gathered?

It does matter. 10 people from the same household (actually living together, not merely relatives) are much safer than 10 people gathering from 10 different households. And the longer the exposure, the greater the risk. The advice is that unless all 10 people are from the same

household, they should socially distance, and wear masks to the maximum extent possible. That means people from different households should ideally be eating Thanksgiving dinner at different tables if spending the Thanksgiving holiday together.

16. What “phase” is Canton in now and how does Canton compare to other surrounding towns?

Effective November 6, the State changed the formula for interpreting the data according to the metrics. According to the new formula Canton is yellow, phase 3, Step 1. We need to remain yellow for 3 continuous weeks before we can move to phase 3, Step 2 where the rules are a little more lenient. We are trending lower, with a Average Daily Incidence Rate of 10.8% and a positivity rate of 1.67% . (See video of November 12 webinar for screen shots of Canton’s testing results vs. other surrounding towns).

Positivity rates are calculated by the State for every community weekly for the prior 14 days. This information is on the Mass.gov website. The positivity depends on the number of people that test positive and the number of people that get tested.

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/weekly-covid-19-public-health-report-november-12-2020/download>

17. Our postal carriers often do not wear masks. Are the USPS and other delivery staff required to wear masks while delivering mail? Especially in a highly populated area, mail is being delivered everyday directly to our front doors or handing it to a person by a mail carrier WITHOUT masks on. Could the delivery person visiting so many households be spreading the virus if they were positive?

The amount of time that it takes for a letter carrier to hand mail to a resident is typically minimal. Also residential mail delivery is typically outdoors. Taken together the likelihood of transmission from a letter carrier to a resident is very low. That said, it’s always a good idea to wear a mask if accepting mail or a package from a third person delivery service coming to your door.

18. Is there a concern that people traveling during the holidays could increase spread among the community, particularly for the students and teachers returning to school? Is there a policy or recommendation that people quarantine upon returning or would it be a good idea for teaching in-school to be paused for 2 weeks following Thanksgiving?

Canton Public Schools have been doing a great job observing all the safety protocols that prevent community spread. All people traveling must comply with the Governor’s Travel Order. That said, we are concerned that holiday social gatherings could increase the spread of the virus – not necessarily involving out-of-state travel.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has specifically discouraged proactive school closings in the manner suggested. Canton schools have just sent detailed communications to all families in the school community with recommendations for safe activities over school holiday breaks, and reminding all about the required travel quarantines for those who are traveling out of state.