



CAPE COD REOPENING TASK FORCE

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Cape Cod Reopening Task Force Announces Local COVID-19 Test Sites in Collaboration with Regional Stakeholders

Two Sites to Operate in Falmouth and Hyannis, Third Planned for Outer Cape

HYANNIS (12/08/20) — The Cape Cod Reopening Task Force is announcing the "soft opening" of two COVID-19 testing sites at the Cape Cod Melody Tent in Hyannis and the Barnstable County Fairgrounds in Falmouth. The sites are funded through resources secured by Cape & Islands lawmakers in two budget bills, a contribution by Cape Cod Healthcare, and an appropriation from Barnstable County. They are designed to add additional PCR testing capacity amid growing concern over Cape Cod's status as a regional testing desert. The expansion of testing capacity arrives at a critical moment in the regional efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, which has killed nearly 200 Cape Codders this year.

COVID-19 cases have surged on Cape Cod since October after a mask-less "super spreader" event in Barnstable set off a string of local infections. As of last Thursday's Department of Public Health report, 8.78% of COVID-19 tests in the town of Barnstable returned positive results, putting it in DPH's highest risk category for the spread of the virus. Despite today's news, Barnstable County remains one of the few counties in Massachusetts where the Baker-Polito Administration has not established a free, state-run, "Stop the Spread" testing site for residents, regardless of their symptoms.

"After weeks of working to correct the testing inequity in our region and searching every avenue for a solution, we are enormously proud to be able to offer more accessible testing to Cape Codders," said **State Senator Julian Cyr (D-Truro)**. "Today's announcement is the result of a collaborative Cape-wide effort. It would not be possible without Cape Cod Healthcare, Barnstable County, several Fire/EMS departments, community health centers, and municipal leadership. Despite a slow start from the state, our legislative delegation was able to pry these dollars loose so that we can finally offer COVID-19 PCR testing to anyone who needs it on Cape Cod."

"The Southeast of Massachusetts has been chronically underserved in terms of accessible free testing during the course of the crisis. I am so pleased to have been able to work with Sen. Cyr, Rep. Fernandes, and our community partners to establish convenient and free testing in Barnstable County," said **State Senator Moran (D-Falmouth)**. "I hope that this expansion of

service will only be the beginning of further expansion, as communities like Plymouth continue to lack convenient service despite being centers of activity in the region. With COVID rates rising everywhere, I am grateful that we have been able to achieve such significant success on this project, and vow to continue to work with my colleagues and partners to provide timely results for the rest of the district.”

“As case numbers continue to increase across the Cape, widespread access to affordable testing continues to be one of the most crucial ways to stop the spread of COVID-19 and protect our communities,” said **Representative Dylan Fernandes (D-Falmouth)**. “I am proud to have secured \$300,000 to jumpstart this testing site in Falmouth and am deeply grateful for Barnstable County, Cape Cod Healthcare, and the many volunteers who are committed to sustaining this site for the next six months.”

“The support Senator Moran, Representative Fernandes, and Senator Cyr and the members of the Cape and Islands Delegation through the COVID-19 pandemic has been so important for the region to combat this virus,” said **Sean O'Brien, Director of the Barnstable County Department of Health and the Environment**. “These funds and a multi-agency response from Cape Cod Healthcare, Hyannis Fire Department, The Town of Barnstable, Cape Cod Melody Tent and Barnstable County will allow us to provide more testing for the citizens of Cape Cod.”

“Increased access to testing is vital to slowing the spread of COVID-19 which continues to persist in our community,” said **Michael Lauf, President and CEO of Cape Cod Healthcare**. “Cape Cod Healthcare is committed to partnering with local and state officials to provide the necessary resources to help protect our patients, neighbors and our own healthcare heroes.”

“From the beginning of the pandemic, we have known that comprehensive testing is the key to limiting the spread of the virus,” said **Barnstable County Commissioner Ronald Bergstrom (D-Chatham)**. “I am proud that Barnstable County can be a partner in this effort.”

“The Cape & Islands Reopening Task Force is grateful for the leadership of Senators Cyr and Moran and Representatives Fernandes, and the entire Cape delegation along with Cape Cod Healthcare and Barnstable County who have delivered funding for increased testing in three new sites on the Cape,” said **Wendy Northcross, CEO of the Cape Cod Chamber** and facilitator of the Task Force. “Availability of testing is critical for businesses continuity and improving our public health.”

“Testing is an important component in stopping the spread of COVID-19. Having a low cost, easily accessible option in the Town of Barnstable - the largest town on Cape Cod – is one step of many at a time when we see the number of positive cases increase and more people spending time indoors,” said **Mark Ells, Barnstable Town Manager**. “We are grateful for the support of our state legislators and our partnerships with Barnstable County, Cape Cod Healthcare, the Hyannis Fire Department, and so many others working to make this a reality at this critical time.”

COVID-19 spreads efficiently through asymptomatic individuals in poorly-ventilated indoor settings. The most robust testing services are "low-barrier," meaning that they are free or low-

cost, offer walk-in/walk-up services, and are available to patients even without a physician's order confirming symptoms. Limited testing resources on Cape Cod require local sites to operate with at least one of these barriers to accessibility. Due to increased demand, many current sites are operating at nearly full capacity, prompting delays in the delivery of results.

Launching these sites caps off months of advocacy by regional stakeholders, including the Cape Cod Reopening Task Force, the Cape & Islands Legislative Delegation, and the Barnstable County Department of Health and the Environment. Concerns about the availability of COVID-19 tests on Cape Cod began brewing in the summer. In July, Senator Susan Moran and Representative Dylan Fernandes secured a series of amendments to the supplemental budget bill for the 2020 fiscal year that would apportion \$550,000 for regional testing sites, in anticipation of a second wave of COVID-19 infections triggered by colder temperatures. Governor Charlie Baker signed the bill, but the Administration did not subsequently authorize the release of funds.

As delays persisted, Cape Cod's regional testing capability was in a precarious position when COVID-19 cases increased in the fall. Testing capacity had surged elsewhere statewide, but per capita PCR testing on Cape Cod remained lower than almost anywhere else in the Commonwealth through most of October and November. In the absence of the expected funds, Cape & Islands lawmakers publicly urged the Baker-Polito Administration to offer at least one low-barrier "Stop the Spread" site in Barnstable County. The nearest Stop the Spread site to Hyannis, a population center with an active COVID-19 outbreak, is in New Bedford. New Bedford is 47 miles away from Hyannis.

The Administration did not agree to establish a Stop the Spread site on Cape Cod, but they did relent to repeated requests to release funds allocated to Barnstable County in a July supplemental budget, allowing regional health officials to begin planning local test sites themselves.

The Barnstable County government is serving as the fiduciary agent of the funds secured by Senator Moran, which will be used to launch a site in Hyannis. The Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment will be providing PPE for the Hyannis site, located at the Cape Cod Melody Tent. The location was chosen for its large parking lot, and the Town of Barnstable Police Department, Department of Public Works, and Health Department will offer ongoing assistance with traffic flow through the site during its operation. Those receiving a test must collect the sample themselves using a swab provided, and the Hyannis Fire Department will be present on-site to assist with sample collection.

Cape Cod Healthcare will be matching the state funds with an additional \$250,000 to support the Hyannis site. They plan to manage scheduling and billing and will also support the site with interpretive services for non-English speakers.

In Falmouth, the new COVID-19 testing site will operate at the Barnstable County Fairgrounds through a \$300,000 appropriation secured by Representative Fernandes. Both sites will use a sliding scale to make testing affordable for all residents.

Testing sites should be fully operational within the next several weeks. The Cape Cod Reopening Task Force plans to update testingcapecod.info/COVID with information on the hours of operation for each site and the links to schedule a testing appointment.

The Barnstable County Board of Regional Commissioners have authorized an additional \$125,000 in funding to contribute to the operations of this new region-wide testing program. Senator Cyr also secured an additional \$200,000 authorization for this region-wide testing program in the FY21 state budget which is currently before Governor Baker for his review.

In total, over \$1 million has been secured to this point for this new region-wide testing program between the Cape Cod Legislative Delegation, Cape Cod Healthcare, and the Barnstable County government.

Additional sites to provide testing on the Lower and Outer Cape will be announced in the coming days. Further information on specific fees, scheduling, billing practices, and hours of operation are also forthcoming.

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