

Delta variant detected in Massachusetts cluster; residents urged to get vaccinated to protect themselves and their families

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced that genetic sequencing of initial samples associated with the recent COVID-19 cluster in Provincetown tested positive for the Delta variant. While DPH has identified cases in the cluster associated with vaccinated individuals, the total number of cases among vaccinated people in Massachusetts remains extremely low, at 0.1% or 5,166 cases out of over 4.3 million fully vaccinated residents.

Both the State Public Health Laboratory and the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard have contributed to sequencing efforts in Massachusetts during the pandemic. This sequencing data contributes to the tracking of clusters and patterns of disease spread. Both labs identified the Delta variant in cases associated with this cluster and additional specimens from the Provincetown cluster are continuing to be prioritized for sequencing. No new variants have been identified. Massachusetts is fortunate to have in-state laboratory capacity to sequence variants and not rely on out-of-state laboratories.

The Delta variant is known to be more transmissible than the original COVID-19 virus. Individuals infected with the Delta variant tend to have more virus in their respiratory tract than other variants and infected individuals may carry the virus longer. These two factors contribute to the increased transmissibility seen with the Delta variant.

Since its original identification in the United States, the Delta variant has spread rapidly, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently estimated that 83% of cases during the period July 4-17 are attributable to this variant nationally. The estimates during that same time period for Region 1 (which includes: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont) are that Delta accounts for 68% of cases during the same time period.

All three COVID-19 vaccines in use in the U.S have shown to be very effective against the COVID variants and remain the single best way for people to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their community from COVID-19 and its variants. There are over 900 locations across the Commonwealth to get vaccinated in addition to in-home and mobile options. The vaccine is free, and an ID or insurance is not required to be vaccinated. Visit vaxfinder.mass.gov for a list of vaccination locations.

Other public health prevention measures that help stop the spread of Delta and other COVID-19 variants include: getting tested and staying home if you are sick, frequent handwashing or use of hand sanitizer, masking in indoor settings for unvaccinated people, and telling your close contacts if you test positive for COVID-19 so they can take appropriate steps. To learn more about protecting yourself from COVID-19, visit www.mass.gov/covidvaccine.

Residents are also urged to enable MassNotify on their smartphone. The service can be accessed through both Android and iPhone settings; it is NOT an application that can be obtained through an app store. This private and anonymous service notifies users of a potential exposure to COVID-19 so they may take the appropriate precautions. For more information and instructions on enabling MassNotify on your smartphone, visit <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/learn-more-about-massnotify>.