

March 11, 2021

Department of Health Observes One-Year Anniversary of COVID-19 Pandemic; Continues Work to Protect Pennsylvanians

Harrisburg, PA – Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam today marked the one-year anniversary of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, and recognized the Department of Health’s work in preparing for and responding to the pandemic over the last year.

“It has been one year since the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic,” Acting Secretary Beam said. “It has been an incredibly challenging year for so many. The unimaginable loss of far too many lives. We remember them today and every day, those left to grieve and rebuild, and those who struggle to this day.”

“We have learned so much since the first cases were diagnosed in the U.S. and there is hope on the horizon. One of the biggest lessons is that the virus determines the timeline. From the first case in Pennsylvania, to officially being declared a global pandemic, and today, our goal has been to protect people and their health. COVID-19 is a dangerous virus that continues to challenge us, even one year after the first cases were reported in Pennsylvania. As we continue to navigate through this pandemic, it is extremely important that we maintain our collaborative and concentrated state response, remain vigilant and continue to follow the proven public health best practices.”

WHO announced the first coronavirus outbreak in late January 2020, and on March 11, 2020 declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

“We have taken a proactive approach to responding to COVID-19 in Pennsylvania, even before the first cases were reported in the state,” Acting Secretary Beam said. “Over the last year, we have asked Pennsylvanians to alter the way they live in order to protect their own health as well as the health of their friends, family, loved ones, neighbors and others in their community.

“While we have made progress in the fight against COVID-19, we must remember that the battle is not over yet,” Acting Secretary Beam continued. “We now have three companies producing life-saving vaccine, but we must have patience until there is enough vaccine for everyone who wants it. While we wait for everyone to get vaccinated, it is extremely important that we continue to practice social distancing, wash our hands and wear a mask. By continuing to unite against COVID-19, we are another step closer to the end of this pandemic.”

The Department of Health has been responding to COVID-19 in the state since before the start of the pandemic, and even before first cases were reported in Pennsylvania:

Vaccinations

- Worked to get more than 3 million Pennsylvanians vaccinated with at least one dose and more than 1 million fully vaccinated.

Testing

- Facilitated testing sites across the commonwealth, including mass testing sites
- Rapidly developed testing capability in our public health laboratory, including increasing the ability to perform critical tests. The Bureau of Laboratories has completed 230,603 tests since response began.
- Worked with CVS, Rite Aid, and other large testing partners such as Quest and Walmart, AMI, the Latino Connection, Eurofins and the Federally Qualified Health Centers to provide testing opportunities to Pennsylvanians at no cost.
- Collected 12,815,938 PCR and antigen tests

Personal Protective Equipment and Supplies

- Coordinated a statewide personal protective equipment (PPE) distribution campaign to provide critical resources to county agencies, school districts, and a wide range of health care partners
- Managed medical surge coordination efforts that included interfacing with the commonwealth's health care coalitions, developed Regional Medical Operations Coordination Cells, and facilitated the distribution of medical assets including ventilators and other material to facilities in need

COVID-19 Surveillance

- Modified and enhanced our surveillance systems and processes to handle the enormous case numbers
- Submitted and managed more than 12 large federal grants to support COVID response efforts
- Hired more than 50 limited term staff to support basic public health functions and hired more than 1,000 contracted staff to assist with response efforts

Case investigations and Contact Tracing

- Approximately 257,354 individuals have received a case investigation to date since March 2020. That represents nearly 28 percent of all confirmed and probable cases.
- Unveiled a new digital case investigation called the Connect & Protect Form to email with individuals within our jurisdiction between the ages of 19 and 64. Since the implementation of the form on December 21, 2020 until February 27, 2021, we have received over 12,308 completed forms.
- Implemented a Contact Tracing Management System (CTMS) in early October in those areas of the state where Pennsylvania Department of Health is responsible for contact tracing. From October 5, 2020, to February 27, 2021, there were 87,794 of 115,617 contacts, or 76 of the total contacts identified and were effectively reached to communicate their quarantine status and offer ongoing symptom monitoring.

Outbreak Guidance and Response to Various Facilities:

- Provided outbreak guidance and response in hundreds of outbreaks, including in settings such as long-term care facilities, prisons, schools, food production facilities, health care facilities, and retail settings
- Coordinated with the interagency long-term care task force to oversee a wide range of supports to the long-term care community, including:
 - Provision of PPE;

- Provision of testing supplies;
- Provision of staffing supports; and
- Development, management, and coordination of the Educational Support Clinical Coaching Program (ESCCP), the Regional Response Health Collaboration Program (RRHCP) and the Regional Congregate Care Assistance Teams (RCAT) program.

Public Information and Tools

- Implemented COVID Alert PA notification exposure app. More than 840,000 downloads since the launch in September 2020.
- Created the Your Turn eligibility tool. Approximately 333,000 people have signed up for the tool since the launch on February 9, 2021, and approximately 87 percent of users who signed up are eligible under Phase 1A.
- Generated several statewide dashboards for cases, demographics, and other reportable information in addition to the hospital preparedness dashboard and the vaccine dashboard.
- Created the vaccine provider map to list locations of vaccine providers across the state.

Other COVID-19 Safety and Mitigation Measures

- Continuously monitored and interpreted the number of cases, percent positivity and other metrics to understand the burden of the disease, including data shared with the public through an open data portal and on online dashboards
- Managed the allocation and distribution of therapeutics to help minimize the impacts of the disease on the population in a coordinated and equitable approach
- Implemented numerous mitigation orders to help stop the spread of COVID-19 across the state, such as mask mandates, travel orders, gathering limitations, and stay at home orders, among others.

While vaccine supply from the federal government remains limited, the Department of Health is working to ensure the vaccine is provided in a way that is ethical, equitable and efficient. To keep Pennsylvanians informed about vaccination efforts:

- The [Your Turn](#) tool provides a way to register to be alerted when it's your turn to be vaccinated.
- A [commonwealth COVID-19 vaccination guide](#) explains the current process for getting one. Pennsylvanians with questions about the vaccination process can call the Department of Health hotline at 1-877-724-3258.
- [Vaccine provider map](#) to find a COVID-19 vaccine provider near you.
- All of the locations that received vaccine and how much they have received can be found on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution webpage](#).
- [Vaccine dashboard data](#) can also be found on the website to find more information on the doses administered and showcase demographic information.
- Pennsylvanians can provide feedback on the Pennsylvania COVID-19 Interim Vaccination Plan by clicking on the Plan Feedback Form square under Popular Vaccine Topics [here](#).
- Frequently asked questions can be found [here](#).

The Wolf Administration stresses the role Pennsylvanians play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently.
- Stay home to avoid spreading COVID-19, especially if you are unwell.
- If you must go out, you are required to wear a mask when in a business or where it is difficult to maintain proper social distancing.
- Download the COVID Alert PA app and make your phone part of the fight. The free app can be found in the [Google Play Store](#) and the [Apple App Store](#) by searching for “covid alert pa”.

Updated Coronavirus Links: Press Releases, State Lab Photos, Graphics

- [Daily COVID-19 Report](#)
- [Press releases regarding coronavirus](#)
- [Latest information on the coronavirus](#)
- [Photos of the state's lab in Exton](#) (for download and use)
- [Coronavirus and preparedness graphics](#) (located at the bottom of the page)
- [Community preparedness and procedures materials](#)