

**Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI)  
COVID-19: Client & Provider Frequently Asked Questions  
April 13, 2020**

**1. Am I eligible for services from your office?**

- In order to be eligible for ORI services, you must be a resident of Massachusetts and meet program specific-eligibility requirements. For more information, click on the following links:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/education-youth-health-other-services-ori>
  - <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/office-for-refugees-and-immigrants-ori-eligible-populations>.

**2. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, are refugees arriving to the United States?**

- Refugees are not traveling into the United States through the US Refugee Admissions Program unless it has been determined that there is a dire circumstance and travel has been approved by the U.S. government.

**3. I need help applying for U.S. citizenship, can someone help me?**

- Yes, nonprofit offices partnering with ORI are responding to phone calls from lawful permanent residents (also known as green card holders) who may need help. Please use the following link to find a community organization in your area that can assist you:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/doc/community-partners-directory-6/download>.

**4. I need assistance, what organizations can I go to for help and are they open?**

- ORI's community partners are responding to phone calls from refugees and immigrants who need help. Please use the following link to find a community organization in your area that can assist you:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/doc/community-partners-directory-6/download>.
- Individuals should call the Massachusetts **2-1-1** phone information and referral hotline by dialing **211**, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are free and confidential. Interpreter services are available in over 140 languages.

**5. I don't have a case worker, and everything is closed. Can I still get help?**

- Many human service agencies that look closed are providing remote services. Call the agency and leave a message; in many cases you will receive a call back.
- An emergency order was issued requiring businesses and organizations not providing "COVID-19 Essential Services" to close their physical workplaces to customers and the public. However, not all businesses are closed. Grocery, pharmacy, convenience stores, and some restaurants, bars and other establishments remain open, for example. Additional information on Essential businesses and list of "Essential services" can be found at:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-essential-services>.
- Individuals should call the Massachusetts **2-1-1** phone information and referral hotline by dialing **211**, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are free and confidential. Interpreter services are available in over 140 languages.
- Additional resources may be available through Family Resource Centers which can be accessed at [www.frma.org](http://www.frma.org).
- If you are a refugee or asylee, there are offices that ORI works with that provide services for refugees, asylees, and other eligible individuals. Please use the following link to find a community organization in your area that can assist you:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/doc/community-partners-directory-6/download>.

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**6. I think I am eligible; how can I apply for benefits through your office?**

- If you think you are eligible, then you should contact a local refugee resettlement agency to apply for the Massachusetts Refugee Resettlement Program.
- Please leave a voice message, including your name and your phone number and someone will call you back.
- A listing of refugee resettlement agencies in Massachusetts is listed below:

**EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS**

- **Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Boston – Boston & North Shore**  
617-464-8100
- **International Institute of New England-Boston & North Shore**  
857-334-2954 or 857-334-3326
- **Jewish Family Service of Metro West-Framingham**  
508-875-3100 x450
- **Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center-Boston**  
617-238-2430 & 617-238-3433 Evenings & Weekends

**MERRIMACK VALLEY**

- **International Institute of New England-Lowell**  
**978-459-9031**

**CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS**

- **Ascentria Care Alliance-Worcester**  
508-769-8812
- **Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center-Worcester**  
508-873-8939

**WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS**

- **Jewish Family Service of Western MA-Springfield**  
413-737-2601
- **Catholic Charities Agency-Springfield**  
413-452-0572 or 413-657-3549
- **Ascentria Care Alliance – West Springfield**  
413-787-0725 Ext. 409 or 413-726-8506

**7. I just received my asylum grant and want to sign up for refugee services for the 1st time, where should I go to apply?**

- You should contact a local refugee resettlement agency to apply for the Massachusetts Refugee Resettlement Program.
- Please leave a voice message including your name and your phone number and someone will call you back.
- A listing of refugee resettlement agencies in Massachusetts is listed above.

**8. Will I still receive my Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) check, even when offices are closed to the public?**

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- Yes. Your case manager will contact you when your check is ready, and will mail your RCA check to you, or arrange a brief individual meeting to give you your check. Call your case manager if you do not receive the RCA benefit check that you are expecting.

**9. I lost my job. Can I get Refugee Cash Assistance again? How do I do that?**

- Call your case manager and employment specialist and report that you have lost your job. Your case manager will notify you of next steps and what programs you are eligible for.

**10. I lost my job. How can I get unemployment benefits?**

- You may be eligible for unemployment benefits if you are quarantined or if you left work due to risk of exposure or to care for a family member. You don't have to provide medical documentation, but you must: (1) remain in contact with your employer, and; (2) be available for any work your employer may have that you're able to perform. The state of Massachusetts has waived the one week waiting period before applying for benefits. To apply, please visit the following Unemployment Assistance websites:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-unemployment-information>
  - <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-unemployment-benefits>.
- If you have already have someone helping you, then you should call your employment specialist directly to report that you have lost your job or contact your case manager for a referral to Refugee Employment Services.

**11. I'm having problems with TAFDC/SNAP/MassHealth/Social Security. Who can help me?**

- If you are a refugee or asylee, there are offices that ORI works with that provide services for refugees, asylees, and other eligible individuals. Please use the following link to find a community organization in your area that can assist you:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/doc/community-partners-directory-6/download>.
- For information on TAFDC & SNAP, call the Department of Transitional Assistance's (DTA) phone Line at **(877) 382-2363**.
- You can contact the DTA Assistance Line if you have questions about program eligibility or for case information. The line is open from 8:15am to 4:45pm, M-F, and during off hours you can access case information via DTA's automated system.
- For information on MassHealth, call the MassHealth Customer Service Center at **(800) 841-2900 TTY: (800) 497-4648**.
- For Social Security Administration please refer to your local 800 - phone number or access online at <https://www.ssa.gov/onlineservices/>.

**12. I have received an important looking notice, but I can't read it or don't understand it. How can I get help?**

- Contact your case worker about options for assistance. You might be able to take a picture of the document and send it to your case worker. You can send it via text or email.
- If you do not have a case worker then call a local community organization. A listing of organizations with bilingual and bicultural staff can be located here:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/doc/community-partners-directory-6/download>.
- Individuals should call the Massachusetts 2-1-1 phone information and referral hotline by dialing 211, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are free and confidential. Interpreter services are available in over 140 languages. 211 may be able to refer to an organization that could help you.

**13. Are there COVID-19 related documents available in languages other than English?**

- Yes. COVID-19 Printable Fact Sheets are available in several languages on the state's website at

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- <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-printable-fact-sheets>.
- For a directory of translated COVID-19 health education resources please use the following link:
  - <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/ESA/oria/documents/DSHS-ORIA%20WA%20COVID%20TRANSLATED%20RESOURCES%20DIRECTORY.pdf>.
- Individuals should call the Massachusetts 2-1-1 phone information and referral hotline by dialing 211, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are free and confidential. Interpreter services are available in over 140 languages.

**14. It's necessary that I provide in-person care to clients. How can I keep myself and clients safe?**

- Follow the CDC guidelines for protecting yourself and others:
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>.

**15. I can't find hand sanitizer, what do I do?**

- Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is recommended. Watch the following quick video on the proper way to wash your hands:
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/videos.html>.
- Follow the CDC guidelines for protecting yourself and others:
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>.

**16. If I have an illness or injury, should I avoid the emergency room so that I don't get COVID-19?**

- If you have a medical emergency, whether it is related or unrelated to COVID-19, you should call 911 and go to the emergency room. This includes any injury or illness for which a lack of immediate treatment may cause harm.
- If you decide that you may need emergency care, be aware that all Medicare-certified and most hospitals with emergency departments are required to provide COVID-19 medical screening before allowing patients into the facility.

**17. My family is worried about getting sick. What can I do?**

- There are simple things you can do to help keep yourself and others healthy.
  - Social distancing is important, if you must go out:
    - Don't gather in groups.
    - Stay 6 feet away from others when you must leave your home for essential trips.
    - Don't shake hands or hug.
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food. Use alcohol-based hand gel with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
  - Stay home when you are sick and avoiding close contact with others.
  - Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue,
  - Clean things that are frequently touched (like doorknobs and countertops) with household cleaning spray or wipes.
  - Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hand, and then throw the tissue in the trash.
- People who show no symptoms of illness may still be able to spread COVID-19. A face covering may help prevent you from spreading COVID-19 to other people.
  - A face covering can include anything that covers your nose and mouth, including dust masks, scarves and bandanas.

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- Do not use health care worker masks, such as the N95 masks - those should be preserved for healthcare workers.
- It is important that you wear these face coverings or masks in situations where it is difficult to maintain a social distance of six feet from others. For more information on face coverings see:
  - [https://www.mass.gov/news/advisory-regarding-face-coverings-and-cloth-masks?\\_ga=2.136134262.659980075.1586285764-772801386.1395518446](https://www.mass.gov/news/advisory-regarding-face-coverings-and-cloth-masks?_ga=2.136134262.659980075.1586285764-772801386.1395518446).
- Contact your Primary Care Provider for guidance.
- Check videos found on the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) website regarding symptoms of Coronavirus 2019 Disease, 6 steps to prevent COVID-19, and 10 things you can do manage COVID-19 at home. This information is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/videos.html>
- If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency that requires immediate attention, please call **911** or the number for your local emergency service.

**18. My family is worried about having money and food. What can I do?**

- You should notify your case worker or employment specialist over the phone about how you are feeling and your concerns.
- Contact your local food bank or food pantry, more information can be found here:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/find-a-local-food-bank>.
- Individuals should call the Massachusetts **2-1-1** phone information and referral hotline by dialing **211**, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are free and confidential. Interpreter services are available in over 140 languages.

**19. My children are bored and want to go outside to play or go to school. What can I do?**

- Individuals and families can still go outside to get fresh air; however, you must practice social distancing while outside (stay at least six feet apart) and avoid touching surfaces frequently touched by others.
- The DPH Public Health Advisory: Stay-at-Home Advisory can be found on the state website at:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/news/dph-public-health-advisory-stay-at-home-advisory>.
- There are many websites to help families cope, including: <https://www.mspsc.org/covid-19-resources/>. Resources on this website include 14 links of "Fun activities while practicing social distancing" and a COVIBook PDF in 19 languages for explaining the virus to children and ways to prevent it.
- If you or your children are interacting with other people, be aware that people who show no symptoms of illness may still be able to spread COVID-19. A face covering may help prevent you from spreading COVID-19 to other people.
  - A face covering can include anything that covers your nose and mouth, including dust masks, scarves and bandanas.
  - Do not use health care worker masks, such as the N95 masks - those should be preserved for healthcare workers.
    - It is important that you wear these face coverings or masks in situations where it is difficult to maintain a social distance of six feet from others. For more information on face coverings see:
    - [https://www.mass.gov/news/advisory-regarding-face-coverings-and-cloth-masks?\\_ga=2.136134262.659980075.1586285764-772801386.1395518446](https://www.mass.gov/news/advisory-regarding-face-coverings-and-cloth-masks?_ga=2.136134262.659980075.1586285764-772801386.1395518446).

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**20. How can I make sure that my kids are keeping up with their schoolwork?**

- Parents should talk to their children’s teacher or go to their children’s school’s website.
- Parents can also access information on the state’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education COVID-19 website: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/ed-resources.html>.
- Letters were distributed to Families about Remote Learning (March 30, 2020) and are available in 5 languages.
- Learning activities and resources for families who are home with children due to the coronavirus can be found on the state’s webpage - <https://www.mass.gov/lists/early-childhood-education-resources-for-families>.
- If you are a refugee or asylee and need more help, the Refugee School Impact program provides services to help schools and parents. Please use the following link to find a Refugee School Impact program in your area that can assist you:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/doc/community-partners-directory-6/download>.

**21. I am feeling very sad and nervous. What can I do?**

- You should contact your Primary Care Provider for assistance. You may get a referral for counseling, which can be very helpful in times of stress.
- You are not alone. Call your case worker or employment specialist over the phone to let them know how you are feeling.
- Individuals should call the Massachusetts **2-1-1** phone information and referral hotline by dialing **211**, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are free and confidential. Interpreter services are available in over 140 languages. Ask for “Call to Talk” services.
- If you’re feeling alone and struggling, you can also reach out to The Crisis Text Line by texting **TALK to 741741** or National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK**. Or call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services’(SAMHSA) National Helpline – **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**. You may also check the following link for Massachusetts Crisis and Suicide Hotlines:
  - <http://www.suicidehotlines.com/massachusetts.html>.
- For information about Maintaining Emotional Health & Well-Being During the COVID-19 Outbreak, visit the Commonwealth’s website at:
  - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/maintaining-emotional-health-well-being-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>.

**22. My family is all together and someone in my house is always angry. What can we do?**

- If you or someone you know is quarantining in a home where they do not feel safe, help is available through the Safe Link Crisis Hotline: **(877) 785-2020; TTY: (877) 521-2601**. Safe Link is multilingual and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Advocates can help with safety planning, and finding resources for shelter, domestic violence support groups, and many other needs. You can also call The National Domestic Violence Hotline also offers assistance and safety planning 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call **1-800-799-7233** for live support. If you’re unable to speak safely, you can log onto <https://www.thehotline.org/> to chat online, or text **LOVEIS to 22522**.
- Please call immediately if you know of, or suspect, an incident of child abuse or neglect. During regular business hours (8:45 a.m.-5 p.m. M-F) call the Department of Children & Families (DCF) area office that serves the city or town where the child lives. On nights, weekends, and holidays dial the Child-at-Risk Hotline at **800-792-5200**. A complete list of all DCF Area Offices can be found at the following link:
  - [https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-children-families/locations?\\_page=1](https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-children-families/locations?_page=1).

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- Individuals should call the Massachusetts 2-1-1 phone information and referral hotline by dialing **211**, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are free and confidential. Interpreter services are available in over 140 languages.
- 23. My organization has a contract with the ORI, and I have many questions about how the COVID-19 response will affect my contracted services and outcomes. How do I get guidance?**
- You should contact the ORI Program Coordinator with your questions, and you will receive guidance.
- 24. Are there interest-free loans for nonprofits so that they can continue operating?**
- The U.S. Small Business Administration’s Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program is accepting applications from Massachusetts businesses.
  - We encourage impacted Massachusetts companies to apply: <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/disaster-assistance>.
  - If you applied for the Mass Growth Capital Corporation’s Small Business Recovery Loan Fund (<https://www.empoweringsmallbusiness.org/>), we encourage you to apply for additional EIDL support.
  - Additional information available on the state's COVID-19 webpage - [COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Businesses](#).
  - Additionally, Mass. Emergency Management Agency’s (MEMA) Emergency Operations Center is operating a Private Sector Hotline, staffed Monday – Friday from 8am to 4pm. The number for the hotline is **508-820-2094**.
  - We strongly recommend that you track expenses and losses related to the COVID-19 response. This information may help you to access federal, state, or private resources.
- 25. Can ORI provide any additional funding to help providers cover expenditures related to offering services remotely?**
- ORI cannot provide new funding at this time.  
See above guidance for benefits available to businesses impacted by COVID-19 response.
- 26. I lost my job and now I'm afraid that my landlord is going to evict me and my family because I can't pay the rent. What should I do?**
- On March 10, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker announced a State of Emergency in Massachusetts to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Commonwealth. The State of Emergency includes a new \$5 million special fund under the RAFT (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition) program for eligible households (families and individuals) who may face eviction, foreclosure, loss of utilities, and other housing emergencies.
  - RAFT funding is distributed by Regional Administering Agencies. The websites of the Regional Administering Agencies are below. Please check these websites for information about how to apply for the RAFT program while offices are closed. All of the following offices are operating remotely and will be able to take applications and questions:
    - **Berkshire Housing Development Corporation:** [www.berkshirehousing.com](http://www.berkshirehousing.com)
    - **Community Teamwork Inc.:** [www.commteam.org](http://www.commteam.org)
    - **Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority:** [www.fcrhra.org](http://www.fcrhra.org)
    - **Housing Assistance Corporation:** [www.haconcapecod.org](http://www.haconcapecod.org)
    - **Way Finders:** [www.wayfindersma.org](http://www.wayfindersma.org)
    - **Metro Housing Boston:** [www.metrohousingboston.org](http://www.metrohousingboston.org)
    - **RCAP Solutions:** [www.rcapsolutions.org](http://www.rcapsolutions.org)
    - **South Middlesex Opportunity Council:** [www.smoc.org](http://www.smoc.org)