



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

PHN 2021-18

To: All Local Housing Authority (LHA) Executive Directors
From: Fatima Razzaq, Acting Director, Division of Public Housing
Re: Continued COVID-19 Vigilance in light of Delta Variant and increasing transmission rates
Date: August 18, 2021

DHCD is circulating updated and restated COVID-19 guidance given the new information available on the highly contagious Delta Variant and its risk to vaccinated individuals. The guidance provided in [PHN 2021-11](#) is still in effect, although with the recent rise in transmission DHCD does emphasize that decisions about community room opening and mask wearing can be decided locally.

[The CDC maintains](#) that the best line of defense against this and all other variants is vaccination and masking when in indoor public spaces and crowded outdoor settings. While fully vaccinated individuals are at a significantly lower risk of infection, recent data shows that fully vaccinated people who *do* become infected with the Delta variant *can* spread the virus to others and current CDC guidance is that both vaccinated and unvaccinated people should wear masks when in areas with “high and substantial transmission”. The CDC has a [map that provides current transmission rates in each county of Massachusetts](#).

While most public health restrictions have been lifted, individual businesses, non-profits, and government entities such as Housing Authorities **can set their own rules for employees and visitors** as long as they are consistent with existing contracts and laws. Housing authorities should work with their local board of health and their attorney for guidance.

Though there are no blanket DHCD mandates or recommendations at this time, LHAs should feel empowered to make decisions at their own discretion regarding instituting masking requirements for staff and/or the temporary closure of community rooms. DHCD encourages LHAs to work with their local boards of health on any specific questions relating to COVID-19 safety protocols, policies or procedures.

Moving forward and until further notice, DHCD staff have been instructed to wear masks when entering resident units. DHCD staff have been instructed to social distance when in confined indoor spaces and to wear a mask when social distancing is not possible.

At this time, DHCD is not pausing capital projects and plans to begin onsite PMRs in late September beginning with the FYE 6/30/21 cohort. LHAs should not pause unit inspections.

Because employees are frequently dealing with COVID or the need to quarantine, LHAs are reminded that there is a current legislative mandate to provide COVID-19 leave time to certain eligible employees who

are sick or need to quarantine, or are being vaccinated, but this mandate is only in effect until September 30, 2021 or until a \$75 million dollar fund is exhausted whichever occurs sooner. [The COVID-19 Temporary Emergency Paid Sick Leave Program](#) fact sheet for employers is available on the Commonwealth's website. If you have questions about this law you can talk with your attorney, payroll service or DHCD.

Please contact your Housing Management Specialist with questions about this notice, and Risk Management Specialist Sarah O'Leary with specific questions about employment law and policies.