



MESSAGE AND UPDATE REGARDING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

March 15, 2020 @ 6:00 p.m. (scroll down to read prior updates)

Dear Community,

In response to the emergent threat to public health, safety and welfare posed by the 2019 novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), and acting in my capacity as Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Athol, I have declared that a State of Emergency exists within the Town effective at 6:00 p.m. on March 15, 2020.

This action ensures that the Town can access federal and state emergency aid to assist in the local response to COVID-19. The measure follows recent declarations of emergency, and a pandemic, by the President of the United States, the Governor of the Commonwealth and World Health Organization.

Further, in order to best protect the health of our public and our staff – effective immediately and until further notice – the Town Hall, Athol Library and Senior Center shall be closed to the public.

Staff will continue the administrative work of the Town and the general public is strongly encouraged to conduct their business through the Town's Web site (www.athol-ma.gov), by using the drop box located at the front entrance of Town Hall, through U.S. mail, or by calling ahead to make other safe arrangements. The Web site offers a variety of options for making payments, checking assessor records and accessing public meeting information. More information will issue over the coming week.

Please note that police, fire and emergency medical services remain ready to respond 24/7 to any emergency. And, all Town staff will endeavor to assist you following best practices outlined by local, state and federal health officials to ensure the safety of all involved. If you experience fever, cough or shortness of breath call your primary care physician. In case of an emergency Dial "911".

On Monday, staff will convene to discuss accessibility options and continuity of operations planning. On Tuesday, the Board of Selectmen meet to conduct both routine business and to discuss a recommendation to cancel existing events in public buildings and events that require a permit from the Town. Today, the Governor proclaimed that there should be no public gatherings of more than **25** persons. Other authorities have suggested no assemblage or utilizing "social distancing" (staying at least three to six feet apart) to limit spread of the virus. (See also next page for safety tips and contact information).

Please know that I work for you under the direction of the Board of Selectmen. You should always feel free to express your thoughts or concerns to the Board by emailing: selectmen@townofathol.org. You may also email me directly at: suhoski@townofathol.org. Despite the high volume of emails we do try to respond promptly to any inquiries.

While the above message may sound dire, it is really about following the guidance of leading scientific and health professionals. Time will allow for more information and thoughtful reconsideration of our response to COVID-19. For now, we err on the side of caution for our residents and our municipal staff.

Be responsible, and please be safe.

Sincerely,

Shaun A. Suhoski, Town Manager

NOTICE REGARDING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Issued March 13, 2020 @ 7:30 p.m.

On March 10 Governor Baker declared a State of Emergency in the Commonwealth in response to the threat to public health posed by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and this afternoon President Trump declared it a “national emergency.” Locally, be assured that Athol’s elected and appointed officials have been and continue to actively monitor this rapidly evolving situation and its potential impacts on the citizenry.

Local Response

Town officials are in regular communication with the Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health (DPH), Athol Hospital / Heywood Healthcare, the Athol-Royalston Regional School District and neighboring jurisdictions to share accurate information with the community and to make recommendations based upon the latest data and the best interests and safety of all.

On March 17, the Board of Selectmen will hear a recommendation from the Town Manager, Health Agent, Fire Chief and Police Chief to cancel existing events in public buildings and events that require a permit from the Town until further notice. This will include staples of the community such as the River Rat Race, the parade, carnival and associated events. The Town Manager has also issued protocols for staff, and departments are updating their continuity of operations plans to ensure that local government can provide essential functions in the event the virus impacts staffing levels.

What Can You Do?

Responsible citizens can have a significant impact in protecting themselves and limiting the spread of the disease by following proven steps recommended by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

If you are sick, to keep from spreading respiratory illness to others, you should:

- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

According to the CDC, patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of: fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you have these symptoms contact your primary care provider. You may also dial “211” for resources, or, call Tully Walk-in Care at 978-248-8558 in advance.

More Information

Go to www.athol-ma.gov and click on the Coronavirus link for concise fact sheets from the CDC and DPH. You can also link directly to the DPH Web site for more detailed information. Please be safe and healthy.