



Ombudsman Update

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FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

By Lauren "Laurie" Andersen, MM, RN, CEN, CCRN

Happy New Year!

A new year is a good time to reset and reinvest in yourself, your family, your friends, and your health! Take the opportunity of a new year to refocus on making your life better, healthier, and more connected. The Office of the Ombudsman (Office) hopes that joy, hope, and peace are all part of 2023 for you!

First, I've admired how each of you has faced all of the challenges of COVID-19 and its impact within the walls of MA Department of Correction (DOC) facilities. The Office respects how difficult this pandemic has been on your lives, spirits, activities, and families.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic continues to influence our daily lives in the DOC, gratefully, both the number of COVID-19 infections and the acuity of those infected with COVID-19 have decreased significantly. COVID-19 variants (currently called BQ.1, BQ1.1, and XBB.1.1) continue to result in positive COVID-19 infections that require isolation and quarantine. I want to thank you for your diligence and attention to continuing to follow measures that protect all who work and live at DOC facilities. At this time, the Office continues to recommend testing and isolation/quarantine for positive COVID-19 cases but has adjusted the time frame for the follow-up. On November 29, 2022, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) released updated guidelines for corrections. On December 16, 2022, the Office updated the DOC staff guidelines on the Office website [here](#).

FROM THE OMBUDSMAN - CONTINUED

The Office has also partnered with a specialized environmental cleaning company, *Lighthouse Environmental Infection Prevention* (Lighthouse EIP), to provide support and oversight of the cleaning processes at all DOC facilities. The Office is pleased with the new cleaning processes implemented for the benefit of all those living and working within DOC facilities. Tom LaRochelle from Lighthouse EIP will be the Office's representative for oversight of the cleaning processes, chemicals used, and maintenance of standards of cleaning. Mr. LaRochelle is also available to support training and answer questions about the cleaning process.

As you know, with the onset of the winter months, there is an increase in illnesses including influenza (Flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and gastrointestinal illness. I encourage you to usse the basic infection control standards and healthy habits to avoid illness when possible.

Some healthy infection control and COVID-19 prevention habits include:

- ✓ Let DOC or Wellpath staff know if you have symptoms of illness.
- ✓ Get tested for COVID-19 if you are feeling sick or are exposed to someone who is.
- ✓ Wash your hands frequently.
- ✓ Clean high-touch areas like phones and tables before you use them.
- ✓ Cover your mouth if you cough or sneeze.
- ✓ Get vaccinated for Flu and/or COVID-19 to lower your chances of getting infected.

In the upcoming months, the Office will be working with the DOC to present some more information on mental health, physical health, and wellness for DOC staff. We care about each of you and want to support you in the important and difficult work that you do.

Thank you for all you do!

Best,

Laurie Andersen

ABOUT THE OFFICE



Office of the Ombudsman

Independent COVID-19 Oversight to
MA Department of Correction

The independently operated Office of the Ombudsman, run by Lauren M. Andersen, MM, RN, CEN, CCRN, Director/Ombudsman, monitors, and reports on the Massachusetts Department of Correction's efforts to limit the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) in the DOC's facilities across Massachusetts.

CONTACTING US



Website: <https://covidombudsman-madoc.org>

Inquiries can be submitted anonymously if desired. If you provide your contact information when filling out the form, the Office will use its best efforts to respond within 2 business days.

We look forward to addressing your COVID-19-related questions, concerns, and inquiries.

Free Call: 1-833-662-8410

You may also submit your COVID-19 inquiry or concern via our telephone number. COVID-19-related inquiries may be left anonymously. If you would like a response from the Office, then please leave your contact information as instructed on voicemail.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS & CONCERNS

The Office would like to share with you a few items that have been reviewed, including:

- ✓ **Masking is voluntary:** For most of the time, in most places, masking is now voluntary. In all healthcare areas (where medical care is being provided), masking will continue to be mandatory per the CDC guidelines for healthcare. At times, when there are clusters of COVID-19 outbreaks, masking will need to be mandatory during isolation and quarantine periods, and rarely facility-wide for larger outbreaks.
- ✓ **DOC corrections facilities have isolated outbreaks:** On December 27, 2022, MCI Framingham returned to mandatory masking facility-wide. This recommendation was made after a careful review of COVID-19 infections, the number of units with positive cases, the number of staff who were positive, the wastewater counts, and the community infection rate. This is a temporary recommendation that will remain until the COVID-19 cases at MCI Framingham begin to decline.
- ✓ **Communication:** The Office is working on this every day! We now have the website, email, and phone number. We would love to hear from DOC staff regarding concerns and questions about COVID-19 and the post-pandemic world.
- ✓ **Feedback:** We would love to hear from the DOC staff and leaders as we move toward a post-pandemic normal. Any suggestions about how the Office can support your mental health, physical health, and wellness are encouraged.