



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE & FINANCIAL SERVICES
BURTON M. CROSS BUILDING, 3RD FLOOR
78 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0078

SERVING THE PUBLIC AND DELIVERING ESSENTIAL SERVICES TO STATE GOVERNMENT

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

KIRSTEN LC FIGUEROA
COMMISSIONER

March 25, 2021

Dear State Employee,

Check out this article from TIME Magazine: [We're in the Third Quarter of the Pandemic. Antarctic Researchers, Mars Simulation Scientists and Navy Submarine Officers Have Advice For How to Get Through It.](#)

The article examines the concept of the Third Quarter Phenomenon. It says the phenomenon, still theoretical, was initially identified “by researchers studying people living in cold regions” and “is characterized by mood shifts among people nearly finished with a long period of isolation. Those affected often feel anxious, withdrawn, and increasingly vulnerable. Researchers haven’t been able to definitively prove the phenomenon exists, in part because its effects can vary from person to person. But anecdotal evidence and research suggest it often strikes people beginning 75% of the way through an isolating event.”

We are so close. But so far. With maybe one-quarter-ish of the work still ahead. Now is not the time to let down our guard.

To that end, I am pleased to report that the State Employee Health Commission voted to extend 100% coverage for COVID-19 treatment. This full coverage was set to expire but, instead, if a member of the health plan is diagnosed with COVID-19, the member will have no out-of-pocket costs from in-network doctors, hospitals, and other healthcare professionals. This coverage will be reviewed each month through the current public health emergency.

This news comes as the Maine CDC is tracking a steady increase in the number of new cases in Maine, topping or approaching 200 for many days in a row. On the topic of variants, Commissioner Lambrew at DHHS says: “we know they are here.”

In order to avoid an even more aggressive uptick in cases, it is still important to be mindful of **The Four Ws: Wait** (remember to stay home if sick), **Wash** hands with hot and soapy water, **Wear** a face covering, and **Watch** your distance. (For the foreseeable future: These safeguards should be observed *even if* you are vaccinated.)

Continued vigilance is needed for multiple reasons: We have not yet achieved a level of immunity that would mitigate the risk of community transmission; there is not yet an approved vaccine for children under the age of 16; some people will choose not to be vaccinated; there will be no way to know who in a room or crowd has been vaccinated; and travel will increase

over time, which is important to our economy and our quality of life, but comes with risks. We have proven, however, that public health measures like masking and distancing greatly reduce the risk. Thank you for keeping them up in the coming months.

As Governor Mills announced this past Friday, [Maine is accelerating the timeline of its vaccination plan to make more people eligible for COVID-19 vaccines earlier](#). Beginning this week, Maine residents age 50 and older are eligible for vaccination. Beginning Monday, April 19, 2021, all Maine residents age 16 and older will be eligible for vaccination. The accelerated timeline comes as some Maine vaccine providers are reporting availability of appointments and as Maine anticipates an increase in vaccine supply from the Federal government.

DHHS continues to work with healthcare organizations to expand hours at existing vaccine clinics and to add new sites for vaccination – and Maine has been in the top ten states when it comes to the percent of residents who have received the COVID-19 vaccine. Commissioner Lambrew says, “we work every day to meet if not beat the President’s goal of widespread vaccination by the Fourth of July.”

Maine’s vaccination plan is designed to get as many shots in arms as quickly as possible and does not include special eligibility for State workers. This is not due to any value assessment of your work: your work during the pandemic has been extraordinary. Instead, the approach Maine has adopted reflects recent scientific data indicating that age is among the strongest predictors of whether an individual is likely to get seriously ill and die from COVID-19. The death rate has indeed dropped by 75 percent since its peak two months ago. But since COVID-19 continues to kill people in Maine, we continue to focus on vaccinating the groups of people most at risk of it.

To support those of you who wish to obtain a COVID-19 vaccination in the coming weeks and months, and in an effort to ensure that your work schedule is not a barrier in doing so, the Governor has authorized up to two (2) hours of administrative leave for each appointment for executive branch employees whose scheduled vaccination appointment falls during their regularly scheduled work hours. This administrative leave is available beginning March 22 through August 31, 2021 and is not retroactive. Please reference the email from Breena Bissell earlier in the week on this topic, and/or contact HR with questions.

Information on vaccination locations may be found on Maine’s COVID-19 vaccine site: <https://www.maine.gov/covid19/vaccines/vaccination-sites>. You may also hear directly from your health care provider. Vaccination does require an appointment, which are scheduled on a rolling basis. There is no charge for the COVID-19 vaccine, but you should be prepared to provide any insurance information and proof of eligibility at the vaccination site (for Health Plan members, we recommend bringing both your Anthem insurance card and your ExpressScripts prescription card).

Meantime, take it from the aforementioned article about polar explorer and submarine captains: “... The fact that we may nearly be out of the pandemic woods—thanks largely to mass vaccination efforts underway—may present new psychological hurdles. If you’re feeling particularly irritable, unhappy or otherwise off lately, it may help to understand these potential psychological forces at work.”

As we see ourselves through to the end, State employees should continue to adhere to work rules, regardless of vaccination status, including distancing, masking, handwashing, and staying home when sick.

If you have questions about any of this, please contact Human Resources.

To speak with a mental health professional – even for a check in (this has been a lot!) – please do not hesitate to reach out to our free [Living Resources Program](#) via 1-844-207-5465 or at [GuidanceResources.com](#) (*Web ID: LivingME*).

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten LC Figueroa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kirsten LC Figueroa
Commissioner