COVID-19: North Shore deaths recorded, cases up, rate of increase down

By John P. Muldoon - April 15, 2020

We’re into week five of the pandemic, and there are hints it could last longer than we had hoped.

Schools are out until May 4, but the town’s largest employer, EBSCO, added two weeks to its closure and told workers not to come back until May 18.

And, at a school committee meeting Tuesday, Ipswich superintendent Brian Blake said the school closure could go until mid or late May.

As of Tuesday, April 14, there have been 957 deaths due to the COVID-19 disease in Massachusetts. Nationally, the toll stood at 24,485. Although the disease hits all age groups almost equally over age 20, 80% of the deaths have been among people over 65.
In Essex County, there have been 3,594 confirmed cases of COVID-19 detected, according to the state Department of Public Health.

In Ipswich, 17 cases were reported, but some of those patients have recovered and are out of quarantine.

Meanwhile, one member of the fire department has contracted the disease, and two members of the police department tested negative but are in quarantine.

There have been a number of deaths in the North Shore. Two people died in Gloucester, as did a part-time Market Basket employee in Salem. That woman, Vitalina Williams, 59, of Salem, was also a full-time Walmart worker in Lynn.

Although Massachusetts is one of the worst affected states, the daily rate of increase in confirmed cases appears to be slowing. For the first time in recent weeks, the number of days where the percentage increase was in the single digits.

In the meantime, the economic impact of the pandemic continues unabated. Another 6.6 million people filed new unemployment claims nationwide during the week, bringing the total to almost 17 million.

Stimulus checks are due to be sent out this week — and that has prompted another local warning from Sheila Taylor, Ipswich’s Council on Aging director, to beware of scammers.

There has been a recent upsurge in activity, she cautioned in the town’s weekly update, and reminded people never to give out personal information or bank details over the phone.

In other economic news, the MBTA reported that subway ridership has fallen by 92.7% compared to the week of Feb. 24 as people stay away from work either because they were told to or because they were laid off.

The closure of stores has also pushed lottery sales down. Those were off by 33% compared to the same week last year.

On the North Shore, the downturn has prompted a huge increase in demand at food pantries. Julie LaFontaine, who heads up The Open Door in Gloucester and Ipswich, said she
has seen a 69% increase since the pandemic layoffs began.

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