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A DIFFERENT TYPE OF HOLIDAY GREETING FROM GOV. BAKER'S TEAM

It is no secret that, for at least the last six weeks, Gov. Charlie Baker and his health team have expressed considerable concerns about the growing number of Coronavirus cases here. Clearly, with the various level of government restrictions the governor has placed on businesses and personal movements, they are very interested in chasing the infection numbers downward. Much depends on individual personal responsibility to act accordingly; the sooner the numbers can be beaten down, the quicker we can get to a more open economy – according to the Baker Administration.

Furthermore, over the last several weeks we have received more calls from dealers expressing concern about a positive test that an employee has received and what the dealership needs to do to ensure the safety and health of customers and employees. I am confident our member dealers are doing everything they need to do to protect customers and employees during business hours. Dealers, however, certainly cannot control their employees' behavior off hours, which can disrupt operations due to one resultant positive test. If you do require guidance upon an employee's positive Coronavirus test, please do not hesitate to contact us at your Association.

During this Thanksgiving holiday week and as we move into the December holiday season, when the urge arises to be with family and friends in the traditional large gatherings we have come to expect at this time, please remind your employees to be prudent and responsible during their time out of the dealership now and over the next several weeks. As we have helped our residents safely meet their transportation needs during the pandemic crisis, we have done so in a responsible manner so as to not add to the current problem.

The following reporting of the Baker Administration's latest holiday message is provided courtesy of the *State House News Service*.

Health Commissioner Issues Eleventh Hour Thanksgiving Appeal

It's not too late to rethink your Thanksgiving plans.

That's one message public health commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel wants to get out ahead of the Thursday holiday, as Massachusetts continues to confront a surge in COVID-19 cases and as data indicate many travelers are still hitting the road and the skies.

"We are asking individuals to consider the risks and to understand that the safest way to celebrate Thanksgiving this year is with our own households," Bharel said in an interview. "For me, what gives me hope is knowing that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and we can plan to get together next Thanksgiving and next year over the holiday season, knowing that a sacrifice this year can lead to ensured safety for our loved ones and our



knowing that a sacrifice this year can lead to ensured safety for our loved ones and our family, our communities, and to be able to have many more holidays to celebrate with those loved ones in the future."

For almost a month, Gov. Charlie Baker and state health officials have been urging Massachusetts residents to limit in-person Thanksgiving celebrations to only members of their own household and encouraging safer festivities like video-chats with far-flung relatives or dropping off favorite family dishes at the homes of friends and neighbors. The Department of Public Health has published [a list of recommendations](#) for celebrating Thanksgiving.

"We are in the midst of a surge in cases, there is community transmission across the commonwealth, and we are standing up at least one field hospital to treat a crush of ill patients," Baker said at a Monday press conference. "You can't afford to do Thanksgiving and the holidays the same way we've done it in years past."

Governors of other states have been spreading similar messages as COVID-19 case numbers rise nationally. "If you are still planning on holding a Thanksgiving gathering, please realize that it's not worth the risk," New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said in a Monday tweet, and Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo last week lowered her state's gathering-size limit to the members of a single household.

Massachusetts caps indoor gatherings at 10 people, and visitors from anywhere but Vermont and Hawaii, including returning college students and Bay Staters coming back from their own holiday trips, are subject to a travel order that requires them to either quarantine for 14 days or have a negative result on a COVID-19 test administered within 72 hours of their arrival.

Numbers from AAA and the U.S. Transportation Security Administration indicate more people are traveling than has become the recent norm, but in numbers below pre-pandemic levels.

AAA projections from November 12 showed 50 million people expected to travel on Thanksgiving, down from 55 million in 2019.

The TSA screened 1,047,934 travelers throughout the country on Sunday, less than half the 2,321,546 recorded the same weekday last year. Sunday marked only the third time since March that the total number of travelers had exceeded 1 million, along with Friday, November 20 and Sunday, October 18.

Baker said the fact that TSA numbers are lower than they'd normally be pre-Thanksgiving "implies that the message that's been delivered by folks like us and by many others across the country has clearly resonated with many people," and said he hopes those who do travel take precautions like wearing masks.

Bharel said she'd heard, anecdotally, over the past week or so of people canceling flights or deciding not to have older relatives visit.

"There is still time and space for people to reconsider their plans and think about the safest



way to celebrate Thanksgiving, given that we are in this second surge," Bharel said.

The DPH on Monday reported 1,785 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the state's total caseload to 201,835.

Bharel, who battled her own case of COVID-19 in the spring, said she is "very worried that Thanksgiving could lead to many super-spreader events." She said it's important for everyone to act in a way that will protect the most vulnerable and preserve the health system's capacity for treating both COVID-19 patients and those with other conditions.

"We know from our past experiences that COVID-19 grows exponentially, so once the numbers start going up, they could rapidly increase," she said.

The Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association circulated a letter Monday, signed by nearly 100 chief medical officers and chief nursing officers from across the state, urging people to think carefully about Thanksgiving by keeping gatherings small, setting up meal tables to allow for distance, celebrating outside when possible and staying mindful of seniors and those with chronic conditions.

"Throughout the pandemic, we have often been asked how people can support our caregivers as they combat COVID-19 with compassion and bravery," they wrote. "Wearing a mask and avoiding large gatherings is the greatest gift you can give."

Baker has said he's limiting his Thanksgiving festivities to his immediate family, and Bharel said her family made the decision to have everyone celebrate in their own households, in lieu of a tradition that involves people from ages 5 to 82 traveling to Massachusetts from six different states.

For those who do opt to gather on the holiday, Bharel said it is important to take steps to mitigate risks. Along with standard precautions like wearing masks, washing hands frequently and not sharing food or drinks, she recommended keeping meals short, spending time outdoors if weather permits and opening windows to increase ventilation if indoors, and considering eating in shifts so that those who are not eating can keep their masks on.

"The bottom line here is to do everything you can to keep it small," Baker said. "I know that sounds harsh and it runs counter to traditions and habits that we've all pursued around holiday seasons over the course of many, many years. Try to think about the fact that small can be intimate and just as special as larger gatherings and larger gatherings are simply not worth the risk to you or your loved ones."

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