

Virus tally in Mass. increases to 4,955

Death toll stands at
48 as of Sunday
Mayor says beds for
homeless coming

By Andy Rosen
GLOBE STAFF

There are 4,955 known cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts, state officials said Sunday, up nearly 700 from a day earlier. Fatalities associated with the viral outbreak rose by four, to 48, according to the Department of Public Health.

The latest count of deaths from the novel coronavirus included people from across the state. They were a man in his 80s from Essex County, a woman in her 90s from Middlesex County, a woman in her 80s from Berkshire County, and a woman in her 70s from Norfolk County. Two of the patients had known preexisting conditions, state officials said.

The state said more than 39,000 people have now been tested for the illness here, an increase of about 4,000 from the day before.

The number of newly reported cases shrank Sunday, down from more than 1,000 on Satur-

day. The number of new tests was also smaller. On Saturday, the state said the number of people tested had risen by more than 5,500.

As the number of cases grows in Massachusetts, state and local governments are leaning on the private sector to help the public health system meet the demands the virus is putting on it.

Governor Charlie Baker said Sunday that his administration has created an online resource for people and companies that want to sell or donate badly needed supplies for people on the front lines. The program will be accepting supplies including respirators, masks, face shields, goggles, gloves, gowns, head covers, shoe covers, sanitizer, and wipes.

On Sunday night, President Trump said during a briefing that he was "trying to get things to Massachusetts as rapidly as possible" after state officials said the federal government had undermined them when they tried to order the supplies.

"Massachusetts, we're dealing with the governor very strongly, and trying to get things to Massachusetts as rapidly as possible," Trump said, after a reporter asked why some states weren't having their requests for supplies filled. Baker's office could not be reached for comment Sunday night.

Meanwhile, Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh said Sunday that the city had begun converting privately owned

WALSH, Page B2

buildings into shelters for homeless people as part of a plan to make about 550 new beds available. The announcement followed Boston's first case of COVID-19 among the city's homeless population, the mayor said.

The new sites, which include 172 beds at Suffolk University's Nathan R. Miller Hall dormitory and 70 beds at the shuttered Kindred Hospital Boston in Brighton, are intended to ease the burden on existing shelters and slow the spread of the fast-moving virus.



Walsh said the city hopes that by adding resources for homeless people, it can ease the burden on health care facilities where they might otherwise wind up if they become sick on the streets or in overcrowded shelters.

The public health system is already being pushed to its limits by the crisis, with some skilled nursing facilities being converted into coronavirus treatment centers to relieve pressure on nearby hospitals.

"We're looking at how do we find and help as many populations as possible so we're not overwhelming our medical facilities and only the most serious cases go there," Walsh said. He added there could be more sites coming into use soon.

The resources announced by Walsh are in addition to 55 new beds at other sites. The city is also working with the state to repurpose the Newton Pavilion at Boston Medical Center and will temporarily reopen it to meet the medical needs of homeless residents; that facility will provide 250 beds.

All told, Walsh announced about 550 new beds.

Suffolk University president Marisa Kelly said the university was relocating a handful of students who remained in the dormitory following a decision to move classes online in response to the virus.

She said the city reached out to the university administration to see if it could help with the crisis, and Suffolk readily agreed to donate the space. She said she anticipates that the building will be ready for use by students again in time for the fall semester, but given the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, Kelly said she is prepared for anything.

The former hospital at 1515 Commonwealth Ave. is owned by the Davis Cos., which has proposed a 250-unit housing development there. But the building has been idle as the project goes through the permitting process.

Stephen Davis, managing director at the company, said the hospital remained in good enough shape that the company and city were able to get it ready for reuse within a few weeks. Davis said the company has some experience in medical development, but he did not expect such a use for this site.

"Truly, what we saw here was we have this asset. It's just sitting there idle at the moment, and we thought it would be a way for us to lend a hand," Davis said.

Walsh on Sunday thanked the businesses that are helping out with the response to the crisis. But he added that all residents of the city and region can do a lot to limit the toll of the virus by adhering to the social distancing protocols that are in place to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

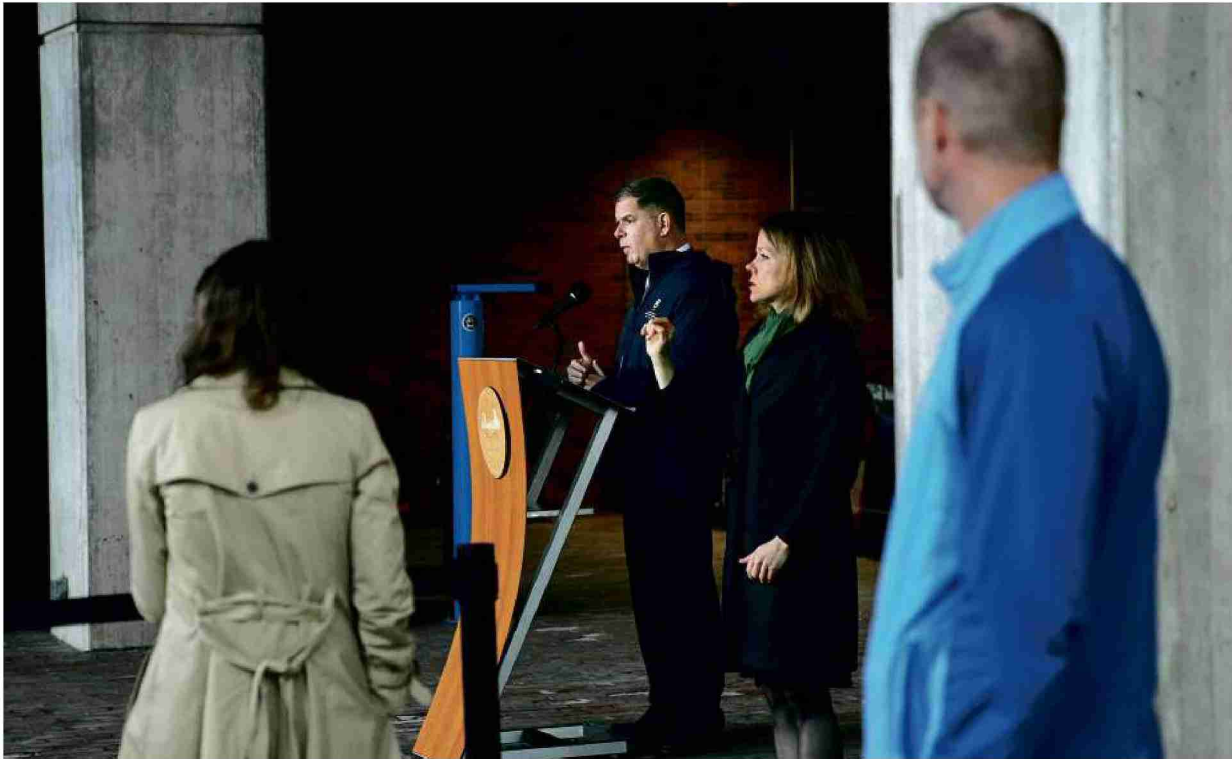
Walsh said he was becoming exasperated by reports of people gathering in groups to socialize or play basketball and soccer in city parks.

He noted that even young, healthy people can get the disease — or pass it to more vulnerable loved ones. It's not worth the risk, he said.

"It's hard for all of us who appreciate freedoms and being able to live our lives," he said. "I'm hoping that no other generation has to go through what we're going through right now."

Andy Rosen can be reached at andrew.rosen@globe.com.

An online site will let residents, companies sell or donate supplies for people on the front lines



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Mayor Martin J. Walsh gave an update on the coronavirus crisis outside of Boston City Hall on Sunday.