

Nantucket issues 'stay at home' order as island reports first coronavirus case

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) and [Dugan Arnett](#) Globe Staff, Updated March 22, 2020, 11:59 a.m.



Passengers wait at the Hy-Line cruise terminal in Hyannis for the 3:05 pm high speed ferry from Hyannis to Nantucket last week. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

The island of Nantucket announced its first confirmed case of COVID-19 Sunday and said it is preparing to issue a “stay at home” order, becoming the first community in Massachusetts to take such a step amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"People could die from inadequate access to medical care if we don't take these extreme measures," the town said in a statement.

The order will take effect at 5 p.m. Monday and directs people on the island to "stay at their place of residence until further notice."

"This not a 'lockdown' and essential services such as grocery stores, pharmacies and restaurants (including take-out and coffee shops — for delivery or curbside pick-up only) remain open for business," the statement said. "There is no reason to panic or rush out for supplies! Most Nantucketers are staying at home already."

The order calls for limiting travel to and from the island starting as soon as Wednesday at 5 p.m., but Assistant Town Manager Gregg Tivnan said that component of the order still needs sign-off from state officials and ferry line operators. Town officials are scheduled to discuss the issue with those agencies Monday, Tivnan said.

The stay-at-home order carves out exceptions, including for people traveling to seek medical treatment; to buy medication, food, and other essential supplies; to get exercise outdoors, including walking and bicycling; and to care for family members or pets in other households.

The order also does not apply to people traveling between essential jobs, including medical professionals, first

responders, key government employees, and people who maintain vital infrastructure, such as utilities.

Others exempt include workers traveling between businesses that are considered essential, including grocery, convenience, and hardware stores; delivery and take-out restaurants; gas stations; organizations supporting people needing social services; and news media.

The order says people who leave their homes should still practice proper social-distancing and hygiene.

The order says anyone who travels there for non-emergency purposes must self-isolate for at least two weeks. It bars anyone from traveling to Nantucket if they have tested positive for COVID-19 unless they can show they've recovered. Anyone knowingly exposed to an infected person also cannot go to the island until they've quarantined for two weeks.

Violations can lead to fines of up to \$1,000. Tivnan said fines will only be issued in egregious cases and doubted any will be, citing how most residents were staying home and social distancing before the order.

"We're trying to impart to the public if it's not necessary please don't do travel," said Tivnan.

"We know we're very unique because we're an island, and we're concerned once it starts here it may spread like wildfire," Tivnan added. "And with a small hospital with less resources they may be overwhelmed very quickly."

The order is scheduled to remain in effect through April 6, however officials will review the order weekly to determine when it will be lifted.

In a Facebook post, Nantucket Cottage Hospital said the island's first confirmed case was screened and tested there on Friday. The person "is quarantined and isolated at home, and is monitoring their symptoms with our clinicians."

Hospital and town health officials have begun tracing the patient's contact with other individuals as well as hospital staff, the post said.

As of Friday, 29 people had undergone testing for the virus at the island's only hospital, which has just 14 licensed beds. Of the nine results that had come back, all were negative, according to a hospital spokesman.

Neighboring Martha's Vineyard announced its first positive case Friday.

Since part-time island residents began flocking to each of the islands in recent days — many in an effort to isolate in summer homes — there have been growing concerns among local officials and year-round residents that the islands would be incapable of handling the influx in the event of an outbreak.

On Sunday, Governor Charlie Baker said state officials want people with second homes on the islands to stop going there.

“We have talked to people on both Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard who say that a lot of people with second homes there have been going there,” Baker told reporters at a press conference. “We would prefer they not do that and that they stay on the mainland and don’t create additional issues for both of those islands at a point in time where they don’t have the same level of service capacity in place they would typically have in the summer.”

“We continue to work on the strategies we have with respect to social distancing and work and we’re going to continue to adjust those as we see fit,” he added.

Nantucket officials said Sunday the decision to issue a stay-at-home order was made in consultation with island hospital and public health officials “with the intent to ‘flatten’ the rate at which coronavirus is potentially spread.”

Town officials have posted more information about “acceptable ways to stay at home” on their website [here](#).

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