

Healthcare in Massachusetts: Important Information for Your First Few Months

Welcome to Massachusetts! This guide has useful information about medical care and assistance that you can receive.

Important Helpful Hints



Dial 911 on your mobile phone or landline phone if you are having a medical emergency. A medical emergency is a serious injury or illness that is an immediate risk to a person's life or long-term health.



Water from the tap/faucet is safe to drink in Massachusetts. There is no need to boil water or buy bottled water.



To stay healthy, wash your hands often.

Safety and Domestic Violence



Massachusetts has resources for people who do not feel safe in their relationship or where they are staying.

You can get help ANYTIME (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) by calling the free Domestic Violence Safelink at 877-785-2020.

Help is available in over 130 languages, including Spanish and Haitian Creole.

Behavioral Health Resources




Behavioral health includes the emotions and behaviors that affect your overall well-being. Behavioral health is sometimes called mental health and can include alcohol and drug use. Examples of behavioral health services are individual or group counseling, support groups, prescription medication and, in cases of severe crisis, may include hospitalization. Services can be provided in many different ways, including in-person, by phone or by video.

If you have an urgent behavioral health need, there are resources to help you:

	 988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE 24/7 CALL, TEXT, CHAT	Boston Emergency Services Team (BEST)	 MASSACHUSETTS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH HELP LINE	Community Behavioral Health Centers
How Do I Access Mental Health & Substance Use Services?	 Call/Text 988	 Call 1-800-981-4357(HELP) <i>Select Insurances Only</i>	 Call/Text 833-773-2445	 Find a center near you mass.gov/community-behavioral-health-centers <i>Select Insurances Only</i>
All Are Available 24/7 All Are Available Statewide All Offer Services in Multiple Languages				
In-Person Treatment Available				

Adapted from a resource developed by the Boston Public Health Commission.

Where Should I Go for Care?

			
	Emergency Room (ER)/ Emergency Department (ED) Severe or life-threatening illness/injury	Urgent Care Mild/acute condition, cannot see primary doctor <i>Follow-up with provider after</i>	Primary Care (General Practitioner/Internal Medicine) Mild condition, routine/preventative care
Symptoms How do I feel?*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chest pain/cannot breathe Severe injuries or broken/dislocated bones Going into labor Head or eye injuries Weakness/numbness or slurred speech Heavy bleeding or vomiting/coughing blood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sprains/Strains Minor injuries (small cuts, bites, burns) Controlled bleeding Sore throat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coughs & Colds Stomach issues Skin issues Vaccines/Health screening Mild fever in children & adults
Services Offered What type of care might I receive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency surgery (if needed) Medication Imaging (such as X-rays) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medication Blood work May recommend ER if serious May do imaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vaccinations or blood work Quick checkup Prescriptions Referrals for specialty care or imaging
Hours	Open 24 hours a day, every day	Every day, hours vary by location	Weekdays, usually 9-5 (by appointment only)

A Guide to Medical Visits

- If it is your first visit with a medical provider, arrive an hour ahead of your scheduled appointment time to fill out important paperwork and get registered as a patient. You will be asked to give a phone number so that the office can reach you for appointment reminders and test results.
- Call to cancel your appointment in advance and to reschedule for another day.
- For all visits after your first visit, we recommend arriving 30 minutes before your appointment time.
- Remember to bring your insurance card to every visit (if you have received it). You can see an image of what the card may look like on the last page of this document.
- It is your right to ask for an interpreter; many locations, including emergency rooms, are required to provide them. An interpreter is fluent in English and in your preferred language and is trained in medical terms to make sure both you and your provider receive the right information.
- If you are not feeling well, please wear a mask. They may be available where you go for care.
- During your visit you may be asked about:
 - any serious illnesses that family members have had in the past (for example, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer)
 - any allergies you have
 - past hospitalizations
 - medical care you received, like labs, medical tests, and vaccines (also known as immunizations)
- Your medical providers are required by law to protect information that is shared privately and are not allowed to share your private medical information with other people. Health information is not shared with immigration officials or anyone else unless required by law to do so.

Adult Medicine / Primary Care

- A primary care provider is usually assigned through your insurance. They are your first stop for all non-life-threatening medical issues. Visiting your primary care provider can help prevent diseases from developing or getting worse.
- Primary care providers can: do annual exams, order tests and give vaccines, and prescribe medicine, including contraception. If you have a chronic condition like diabetes, hypertension, or asthma, they can help you find other providers, known as specialists, for treatment.
- Your primary care provider is often your first stop for medical concerns, even if it is just a phone call to get advice on what to do.

OBGYN and Women's Health

- An OBGYN is a doctor who specializes in pregnancy and childbirth, as well as women's health care. Women's health care includes menstrual disorders, sexually transmitted infections and family planning.
- If you are pregnant, you will see an OBGYN or midwife regularly to make sure you and your unborn baby stay healthy. Your doctor may also order tests to identify potential health problems (this is called prenatal testing). A checkup after you have a baby is an important part of your medical care.
- Family planning includes deciding how many children you choose to have and when you want to have them (timing of pregnancies and birth spacing). You can ask any primary care provider or OBGYN provider to be connected with family planning and contraception support, pregnancy, birth and postpartum care, and abortion services.

Pediatrics/Family Medicine

- Some medical providers can take care of the whole family, no matter their age. These are known as Family Medicine providers. Family Medicine providers are one type of primary care provider.
- Pediatrics providers provide care to infants and children from birth to age 18, including medical exams that kids may need for school. Pediatrics providers are one type of primary care provider.

Medications

- There are two types of medications:
 - Over-the-counter: These are medications that can be bought at the store without a prescription. These might include cold medicines like acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil).
 - Prescription: These are medications that require a prescription from a medical provider, such as antibiotics.
- If you are enrolled in MassHealth, some or all medication may be paid for (covered). Always ask the pharmacist for the cost of the medications.
- Finish medication as prescribed by your provider and do not take additional medications unless you check with your medical provider first.
- Do not share prescribed medications with others and do not throw away unused prescriptions.

Vaccines

- Vaccines are an important way to protect your health, your family's health and the health of others in your community.
- Although Massachusetts public schools require vaccines to attend, children living in hotels and other temporary places cannot be denied entry to these schools if they do not have complete vaccine records.
- If your child has already received a vaccine booklet/vaccine records, bring them with you when enrolling your child in school.
- Some vaccines are offered seasonally, like the flu vaccine during the fall.



Paying for Healthcare

Upon arriving in Massachusetts, you may be eligible for programs such as health insurance and food assistance. Everyone is encouraged to apply, regardless of immigration status. Ask your case worker and/or shelter support staff if you have not yet been enrolled.

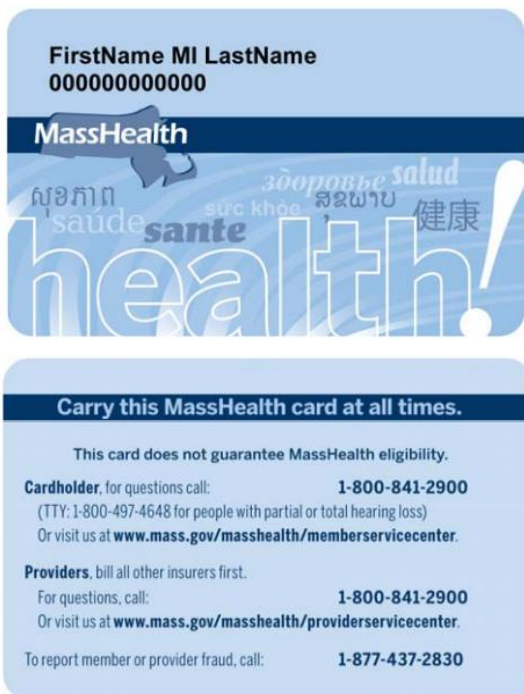
If you have not yet received your insurance card or been enrolled in MassHealth, ask your case worker or shelter support staff about next steps.

The Health Care For All helpline can also help you get or understand your health insurance benefits. Call **1-800-272-4232** (Spanish, Portuguese and Haitian Creole available).

Health Insurance

Health insurance can pay for important healthcare services such as medical care visits, when you need to go to the hospital, medications and more. It can also help you with transportation to your medical appointments. You may be eligible for a type of health insurance called MassHealth. Each family member who gets MassHealth will receive their own card with a unique Member Identification Number. Doctors' offices and hospitals will use these numbers to charge MassHealth for any care and services you receive.

Below is an example of a MassHealth Card:



Food for Pregnant Women and Children

The WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program provides vouchers for healthy foods to low-income families that include pregnant women and/or children who are five years old and under. You can use WIC to buy foods like milk, cheese, eggs, tuna, iron-fortified cereal, peanut butter, infant formula, carrots, beans, and vitamin C-rich juices.

To apply for WIC, ask your case worker or call **1-800-942-1007** to make an in-person appointment.

Below is an example of a WIC Card:



Food and Cash Assistance for Families

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) provides benefits including food assistance (known as SNAP). Call the DTA Assistance Line at **877-382-2363** for support with your enrollment. The line is open from 8:15 a.m. - 4:45 p.m. and help is available in Haitian Creole, Spanish and other languages. Below are examples of cards provided by DTA.



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