

Report of the

Board of Health

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Personnel

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Gael Varsa, Public Health Nurse

Jennifer Cronin, Animal Inspector

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The Board of Health (BOH) is a mandated regulatory agency responsible for protecting the public health and environment, with legal obligations, authority, and responsibilities as set forth in the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) and Commonwealth of Massachusetts Regulations. Various federal statutes further lay out the responsibilities of state and local governments to ensure the public health. The BOH has legal authority to implement and enforce health policies and oversee inspections to protect public and environmental health.

The Board's elected members, agents, and inspectors work to ensure that food, water, soils, and air are protected from contamination that would pose a public health threat. The BOH works to prevent the spread of contagious disease in humans and animals, including diseases, such as tick-borne illnesses, that are transmitted from animals to humans. It is also responsible for ensuring that housing meets minimum health and safety standards. Additional information regarding the BOH can be found on the Town's website (www.doverma.gov).

Environmental Health and Safety

ONLINE PERMITTING

During the second half of 2025, the Board of Health Director, in partnership with the Assistant Town Administrator, oversaw the Town's transition to online permitting. Applications and permits are now submitted, reviewed, and issued digitally through the Town's online permitting portal (OpenGov).

The Board of Health played a pivotal role in the project by providing project leadership and offering grant-funded financial support for project implementation. Additional information regarding online permitting is available on the Town's website.

WATER QUALITY AND SUPPLY

In Massachusetts, Public Water Supply (PWS) companies are those that provide water to 15 or more connections, or 25 or more people. They are regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). Private water supplies (private wells) provide water to fewer than 15 connections, or fewer than 25 people, and are regulated by the local Boards of Health.

PRIVATE WELLS

In 2025, approximately two-thirds of all households in Dover relied on private wells located on residential properties.

The BOH Director is responsible for processing permits for new wells or well improvements, for inspecting the construction of new wells, for inspecting repairs and modifications made to existing wells, for ensuring that flow rates and quantities are satisfactory, for reviewing documentation for new wells and well improvements for compliance with the BOH Water Quality Standards, and (when submitted) for reviewing water quality test results prior to the conveyancing of property for compliance with the BOH Water Quality Standards.

Homeowner responsibilities include the testing of water quality prior to a transfer of ownership (title change) of a home, including providing the BOH and the home buyer with copies of the test report issued by a certified laboratory prior to the sale of the house. If any proposed renovation work results in an increase in the number of bedrooms in a home (or otherwise results in increased water usage), the owner must obtain a permit from the BOH for a quantity (flow) test to be witnessed by the Health Director prior to the issuance of any building permits. If wells have insufficient flow, they must either be modified or abandoned. Homeowners must replace abandoned wells with new wells that meet the BOH's quantity and quality requirements. Well drillers, water quality testing labs, and engineering firms used must be licensed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Dover residents must maintain access to wells from the street to enable maintenance, such as pump replacement or redrilling.

In 2025, the BOH issued 14 permits for new wells that included wells used for drinking water, irrigation, and heating/cooling (geothermal). The BOH was made aware of one drinking water well that ran dry in 2025.

MassDEP provides valuable information about private wells, water quality standards, and certified testing laboratories at www.mass.gov/private-wells. It also offers a public Web-based searchable database of groundwater wells at www.mass.gov/service-details/well-database.

PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES

Approximately 35% of Dover households are serviced by six PWS companies that are regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). The companies that operate in Dover include:

- ***Dover Water Department:*** This Town-owned PWS serves the Chickering Elementary School, Caryl Park, Caryl House, and Parks and Recreation. Water is sourced from Dover wells operated by the Town.
- ***Aquarion Water Company:*** Formerly Colonial Water Company, Aquarion serves 645 households, as well as commercial and public buildings, most of which are in and adjacent to the Town center and connected by Town-owned infrastructure. Water is sourced from Aquarion-operated wells in Dover.
- ***Glen Ridge Resident Water Trust:*** Serves 44 households with water sourced from Natick Public Works.
- ***Meadowbrook Water Trust:*** 27 households receive water sourced from Natick Public Works and Elm Bank wells, which are operated by Natick Public Works and WhiteWater, Inc.
- ***Old Farm Road Water Trust:*** 15 households receive water from a local well operated by WhiteWater, Inc.
- ***Precious Beginnings Preschool:*** Water for this building serving 44 students is sourced from a local well operated by Small Water Systems Services, LLC.

MassDEP publishes information and documents about all PWSs at www.mass.gov/service-details/public-water-supplier-document-search.

BATHING BEACHES

The BOH is responsible for assessing the safety of the water at the Hale and Grossman Summer Camps, which is in the Dover portion of Hale Reservation. The recreational camps that utilize these bodies of water are responsible for testing and reporting the results to the BOH.

SEWAGE DISPOSAL

Because there is no access to a public sewage system in Dover, all buildings require private sewage systems, typically a septic tank and distribution field. Subsurface sewage disposal systems require proper operation and maintenance to avoid failure and expensive repair or replacement. Proper operation includes keeping grease, fats, and oil from draining into systems, avoiding the use of garbage grinders, avoiding hazardous chemicals in laundry products, and promptly repairing leaking toilet tanks and faucets. Proper maintenance includes having septic tanks pumped every other year by a licensed vendor to remove septage. Pumping and other regular maintenance typically costs several hundred dollars. However, it is necessary to prevent septic system failure, which is vastly more expensive.

In addition, some pumps or other mechanical or electric devices installed in innovative alternative wastewater systems (for example, Eljen, FAST, Presby) require regular maintenance according to the manufacturer's maintenance schedule to prevent system disruption.

The regulations contained in the Massachusetts State Environmental Code, Title 5, and the State Sanitary Code, Chapter 2, require that towns provide for septage disposal. The Town of Dover has an agreement with the Charles River Pollution Control District in Medway to have its septage accepted at their sewage treatment facility. The fee paid by residents to the licensed pumper includes both a pumping charge and treatment facility disposal fee.

The BOH documents the required maintenance of wastewater systems by asking residents to submit servicing documentation. Pumping records are submitted by the pump companies to the BOH. The BOH licenses septic system installers and septage haulers and maintains a list of those it has licensed.

MassDEP's Title 5 (310 CMR 15.000 of the State Environmental Code) requires homes that are put up for sale to undergo a septic system inspection by a state-certified Title 5 inspector. The Town of Dover's Chapter 217 Bylaws ("Sewage Disposal Systems") define site and soil requirements. Home sellers must present Title 5 certification of proper septic system functioning to the BOH. Homes that use cesspools rather than septic tanks and leaching fields cannot receive Title 5 certification and must have new systems installed. During the review and approval of septic system construction plans, the BOH often requires deed covenants that prohibit the installation of garbage grinders and/or require regular maintenance of alternative septic systems.

In 2025, the BOH issued the following permits for:

- soil evaluations and percolation tests (19)
- new septic systems (20)
- septic repairs (17)
- demolition of homes (13)
- residential swimming pools (10)
- building plan review (21)

- Title 5 inspections reported and reviewed (78)

FOOD SAFETY

The BOH adheres to the Massachusetts State Sanitary Code (105 CMR 590.000) when issuing food permits. All food establishments and commercial kitchens are required to have an inspection before a permit is issued. Commercial vendors providing food at events and caterers providing food for private functions must also apply for permits. Residents should contact the BOH if their organizations are unsure how the regulations apply to their planned events.

TOBACCO

In 2023, the BOH amended its tobacco regulations for the first time since 2013. The Board voted to cap the number of tobacco license holders in Dover at two. As of 2025, the only two license holders in town are the Dover Market and Mobil. In November, 2025, the BOH passed the Nicotine-Free Generation policy, to be effective January 1, 2026. The policy amends tobacco regulations by prohibiting the sale of tobacco or e-cigarette products to individuals born on or after January 1, 2005.

RECREATIONAL CAMP SAFETY

In Massachusetts, recreational camps for children must be inspected and licensed by the local boards of health in the cities or towns where they are located. To be licensed, camps must meet all the minimum health, safety, sanitary, and housing standards established by MassDPH and any additional local requirements. In 2025, the BOH inspected and licensed nine recreational camps in Dover.

GARBAGE COLLECTION

MassDEP prohibits the disposal of food waste with trash. Although many residents have installed kitchen food grinders or disposals, the Board strongly advises against using them because the small particulate matter they create will clog septic systems' drip fields over time and lead to premature septic system failure.

The Recycling Committee operates a food-waste drop-off program at the Transfer Station where it maintains drop receptacles. In 2023, the Board of Health formally adopted regulations for private waste haulers. In 2025, 9 Trash Hauler Permits were issued.

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE

The BOH, in coordination with the Recycling Committee, conducts the annual Hazardous Waste Collection Day each spring at the Medfield Department of Public Works. Residents may also drop off their hazardous waste on collection days held by other Charles River Household Waste Consortium member towns (Ashland, Bellingham, Franklin, Holliston, Medfield, Milford, Norfolk, Sherborn, and Walpole).

SHARPS DISPOSAL

Massachusetts law prohibits the disposal of medical sharps in household trash. The BOH maintains an approved sharps receptacle at its office on the first floor of the Town House, where residents may safely discard sharps during office hours.

BEAVER ACTIVITY

Beaver activity that leads to flooding periodically is a threat to safety in Dover. In such cases, the BOH issues emergency trapping permits for a limited period. One beaver complaint was received in 2025.

Animal Inspections, Vaccinations, Quarantining

ANIMAL INSPECTIONS

The BOH's Animal Inspector, Jennifer Cronin, annually inspects cattle, horses, goats, sheep, swine, and other non-domestic animals, as well as the conditions under which they are kept. As population changes occur, the BOH updates its inventory of locations at which animals are kept. Active barns are inspected, during which time the Animal Inspector reviews documentation of tuberculin and brucellosis testing, equine Coggins testing, and encephalitis vaccinations, and determines whether the animals appear free from contagious disease. The BOH also regulates manure storage, removal, and composting to protect wetland resources and drinking water.

The following animals were inspected in 2025:

Type of Animal	2025
Horses/Ponies/Miniature Horses/Donkeys/Mules	102
Alpacas	0
Goats	32
Sheep	40
Swine	4
Ducks	46
Chickens	74

VACCINATIONS/QUARANTINING

MassDPH mandates the vaccination for rabies of all dogs, cats, and ferrets at six months of age or older, or within one month of entering the Commonwealth without proof of prior vaccination, and at least once every three years thereafter. Vaccination orders, under the management of the Animal Inspector, also apply to other domestic animals.

In 2025, the Town recorded one instance of a dog bite and no instances of animals quarantined for wounds of an unknown origin.

MassDPH sets forth stringent quarantine requirements for the prevention of the spread of rabies. Dogs and cats exposed by direct contact, by proximity, or by having received a wound of unknown origin, are assumed to have been infected by a rabid animal. If a dog or cat is currently vaccinated, but for longer than a month prior to exposure, or if it is not currently vaccinated but proof exists of a previous vaccination, it must immediately receive a booster vaccination and be strictly quarantined for 45 days.

The Animal Inspector may order that unvaccinated animals be immediately vaccinated and placed under confinement for four months or, failing that, to be euthanized. Vaccination for other domestic animals is also required. The Animal Inspector may order vaccinations for animals whose health histories are unavailable or not in compliance with vaccine regulations.

The BOH conducted its annual rabies clinic April 5, 2025.

Zoonoses

The BOH is involved with the control of animal-to-human disease transmission (zoonosis), including tick-borne diseases, mosquito-borne diseases, infections from animal bites, and other interactions with animals.

MOSQUITO-BORNE ILLNESS

The two mosquito-borne illnesses of significant concern in eastern Massachusetts are Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile Virus (WNV). The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) routinely tests mosquitos for the two viruses from June through October each year.

	EEE	WNV
Cases in Animals, MA	0	1
Cases in Humans, MA	0	9
Cases in Humans, Norfolk County	0	0
Positive Mosquito Samples, MA	23	451
Positive Mosquito Samples, Norfolk County	0	31

The BOH works with the Norfolk County Mosquito Control District (NCMCD). The NCMCD takes an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach to mosquito control, which sometimes includes spraying of insecticide. Homeowners who wish to exempt their property from mosquito-control spraying must file the proper paperwork with the Town Clerk prior to the first of March. For more information, contact NCMCD directly.

TICK-BORNE ILLNESS

Since 2010, the Tick-Borne Disease Committee has implemented a yearly Deer Management Plan (DMP), a regulated hunting program based on the experience and guidance of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and on Dover-specific rules and regulations. The program only allows bow hunting from tree stands and is administered on Town-owned and other conservation land, as well as on private properties with signed permission from the landowners. As in past years, signage was posted along trails and at entrances to all properties participating in the DMP. By season's end on December 31, 2025, a total of deer had been harvested. No injuries were reported. One complaint was reported and resolved on October 30, 2025.

Communicable Disease Prevention and Management

INFLUENZA

The BOH held its flu/covid clinic on October 3, 2025 at the Dover Town House, where approximately 90 residents were vaccinated.

Board of Health Staffing

The Department is currently led by full-time Health Director Jason Belmonte, who oversees four other members of the office staff. Administrative Assistant Sophia Kriegsman joined the staff in September 2025 and works 15 hours per week. Linda Baldwin-Lyons, who has been serving the Town since 2021, works 20 hours a week as an Administrative Assistant. Maxy Gangadharan joined the staff as a temporary Administrative Assistant in November 2025 and works 19 hours per week. Additionally, Gael Varsa became the Town's first Public Health Nurse in 2025. Gael works full-time and serves both the Dover and Sherborn Board of Health.