



Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
67 Forest St.
Marlborough, MA 01752

Guidance for Using Notification Features of the MA Responds System

The MA Responds system features an integrated two-way notification system that can be used to contact volunteers via phone (including extensions), SMS text, pager, fax, email and TTD/TTY. **While emails can be sent through the system at no cost, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) is charged for all other types of communication on a per use basis.** DPH has pre-paid for a pool of minutes that can be requested by local units to use phone and text features in an emergency (at no cost to the individual unit). **Due to budget limitations, DPH has decided to use the pool of minutes for phone and text features only in emergency situations.**

To request permission to use the non-email (phone or text) notification features of MA Responds, a unit administrator should contact Jessica Bowe at DPH OPEM jessica.bowe@mass.gov or [617-366-7137](tel:617-366-7137) (Mobile). If the request occurs during an emergency, and DPH staff cannot be reached by the unit administrator, the below criteria must be followed.

Criteria for Emergency Use of Phone Minutes and/or SMS Text Messages:

An emergency is defined as any occasion or instance in which determination is made by the local unit administrator that assistance is needed to supplement local efforts and capabilities to save lives and protect property and public health or safety, or to lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe. Emergency use is defined as the use of telephone minutes and/or SMS text messages during an emergency.

1. If the emergency requires immediate assistance that must be available before DPH staff can be reached (during the next 12 hours or within the next available working hours, whichever is less), emergency use is authorized.
2. A determination will be made by DPH staff after the emergency that emergency use was indeed necessary.
3. Unit administrators assume responsibility and costs associated with use of phone minutes and/or text messages that are determined to have been used in a non-emergency situation.
4. When prompted to provide a "Billing ID" when using any notification features in MA Responds please include both your unit and your name. "Billing ID" is required even for email communications, although all email messages are free of charge.