Using Mass Notification Systems for COVID-19 Messaging in Connecticut
December 1 2020 Update

As we continue to work together across the state to control the spread of COVID-19 virus during this public health emergency, we want to remind municipalities and tribal nations that the CTALERT Everbridge emergency notification system, which uses the state's E911 database, continues to be available to notify residents of emerging COVID-19 community outbreaks, and other emergency notifications. **Unfortunately, repeated use of the CTALERT system to provide regular municipal updates is resulting in an unprecedented increase in the number of people opting out of the system.** This will result in less people receiving a CTALERT emergency notification for other emergency situations which pose an immediate threat to life, safety or property. We must continue to make sure these databases are used properly, and are not overused, in order to ensure continued community trust and subscribership in these critical systems.

Therefore, we are providing additional guidance for the issuance of a Level 1 CTALERT for COVID using the E911 database. First, a general message on testing site locations in your community should be posted on the municipal website, and updated there. A one-time CTALERT message notifying the public that this information will be posted and updated on the website is appropriate. The CTALERT system cannot be used for regular COVID updates.

Secondly, please remember that a Level 1 CTALERT message is an <u>emergency communication</u>. Therefore, COVID-related messages should be short, and provide specific emergency information, such as an outbreak at a particular location, notice of a short-term pop-up testing site with less than 2 days' notice, or a change in an existing testing location because of severe weather or other unforeseen circumstance.

Municipalities that have purchased their own additional notification systems are certainly able to send out other messages; however, use of the 911 database (**CT ALERT Level 1**) is governed by the guidance in this document, as well as in the 2012 emergency notification system policy attached separately. Also, it is recommended that even a town that is using its own system run the message through this procedure, in order to continue to provide standardized statewide messaging.

There are multiple levels of messaging services in Connecticut.

- **Level 1: CTALERT – E911 by Everbridge**
    - This is the master State of Connecticut account for emergency notifications. This list is offered to all municipalities to use through their PSAPs.
    - CTALERT contains the E911 Database and those who have elected to receive CTALERT messages; use is restricted to the immediate threat to one's life safety or property, which includes messaging related to a COVID outbreak.

- **Level 2: Community Mass Notification by Everbridge**
    - A community may have purchased additional Everbridge services and added, through a sign-up portal, their own contacts. Some communities in Connecticut have their own Everbridge systems in place.

- **Level 3: 3rd Party**
    - A small number of communities have purchased / contracted with a different provider service (non-Everbridge) for messaging.

Kevin McManus is the current point of contact for Everbridge in Connecticut; he will provide direct assistance for **Level 1 (CT Alert – E911 by Everbridge system)** messaging. Additionally, he can provide case by case support for **Level 2 (Community Mass Notification by Everbridge)** messaging. Kevin can be contacted at Kevin.McManus@everbridge.com. Messaging utilizing **Level 3 (3rd Party),** is the responsibility of the local community-- the draft template below can be used for this purpose, and the town may feel free to run its messaging by Kevin for standardization of message.

Standard Operating Procedure:

If a municipality/tribal nation is conducting a testing initiative within its community and wants to use **Everbridge (Level 1 and Level 2)** to get the message out, the following procedure should be used:

1. The community (after approval by the community Executive/Unified Command) provides a script of the COVID-19 Testing/Alert notification to the Everbridge Point of Contact (at this time, Kevin McManus) and to the DEMHS Regional Coordinator;
    1. The notification should include date, times, location, who should be tested, and cost if any;
    2. The notification will include a reminder to wear your mask and maintain social distance from anyone living outside of your home;
2. The community will, if available, post the message on their municipal website;
    1. This will allow for the Everbridge Text and Email message to point to a link with full message details.
3. If the community has a HOTLINE or other similar number, (or if 2-1-1 has been notified), this will be included in the notification;
4. The Everbridge POC (Kevin) will craft and send the notification to the location area:
5. Copies of the message will be provided to the PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point, or dispatch center), DEMHS Regional Coordinator, and other individuals based on the particular community;
    1. This may include the local emergency management director, the health department or district.
6. Certain features such as business locations and yellow page lists will be omitted from the notification;
7. A single (one and done) notification will be sent for that testing period, in order to reduce the likelihood of confusion or "message fatigue".

Below you will find sample message templates for your use; feel free to revise this template for your needs.

Draft Emergency Notification Alert Templates
(If you are using Everbridge, please follow the procedure outlined above)

I.   **Draft Voice Message, Red Alert: 30-45 Seconds Max**
[THE TOWN/CITY OF ----] has seen an increase in positive COVID-19 cases, and the Department of Public Health has issued an alert. Get tested, wear a mask, and increase social distancing. Find a free test at www.ct.gov/prioritytesting.

II.   **Draft Email, Red Alert: 2500 characters or less**

[GREETING],

It is [TIME] on [DAY], [MONTH] [DATE], and this is a COVID-19 update for [TOWN/CITY]. We have seen an increase in positive COVID-19 cases, and the Department of Public Health has issued an alert.

We have had [number] new positive cases since our last update on [date].

[ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT CASES, FOR EXAMPLE]: Three of these new cases are residents under the age of 30.]

[ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT WHERE THE VIRUS IS SPREADING, FOR EXAMPLE]: Our contact tracing efforts show that these cases are a result of community spread, but that there is no evidence of transmission in our schools, or day care centers.]

[TESTING INFORMATION, FOR EXAMPLE: In addition to the new positive cases, we have also reported (number) negative tests since our last update.]

[TESTING SITE INFORMATION, FOR EXAMPLE: In order to stop the spread of COVID-19 it's critical that you get tested – even if you're asymptomatic. Information about testing locations and upcoming testing events in (town) can be found on our website at (link). You can also find the testing site nearest to you by visiting www.ct.gov/coronavirus and typing in your zip code.]

- Find a free test at www.ct.gov/prioritytesting.

[ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM HEALTH DEPARTMENT, IF NEEDED. FOR EXAMPLE]: Our Health Director urges residents to report positive cases directly to our health department in order to facilitate rapid contact tracing to assist in keeping schools open and operating safely. The Health Department office phone number is (number).]

As a reminder, the common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

The complete list of COVID-19 symptoms can be found on the CDC website at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html.

Please remember if you are symptomatic, get tested, and stay home from work or school.

We again remind all residents to continue to practice social distancing when out in public, wear masks when social distancing cannot be maintained, and wash or sanitize hands frequently especially after contact with public surfaces.

Thank you, and stay safe.

[SIGNATURE]

III.   Draft Text, Red Alert: 120 characters or less

COVID-19 cases in [TOWN/CITY] are increasing. The Department of Public Health has issued an alert. Get tested, and get more information at [LINK TO WEBSITE WITH MORE INFORMATION]. Find a free test at www.ct.gov/prioritytesting.