

# Recreation During a Pandemic: The Impact of COVID 19 on Programming in Massachusetts

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### Introduction

The importance of recreation within of our communities is that it helps with both our physical and mental health. Recreation is vital because it helps with both community issues such as crime prevention as well as mental health issues such as depression in elderly adults.

Because of the COVID 19 pandemic, cities throughout the United States have a different approach to recreation in their towns with a pandemic in place. This project was designed to investigate how cities and towns in Massachusetts managed recreation programming through the pandemic.

### Literature Review

-The decrease in recreation has made people sedentary, this includes the large population of children across the United States. (Adamakis, 2021)

-In the beginning of the outbreak having a stay in place order to combat the pandemic was the safest scenario but it has in turn hurt children and adults physically and mentally. (Adamakis, 2021)

-As the pandemic has progressed people turned to the value of outdoor recreation and how it equates to mental and physical health well being (Grilli & Sacchelli, 2020)

-In addition it has been determined that endurance exercise is an ideal activity to help prevent COVID 19 in people (Veramyta et al, 2021) This Project was designed to investigate how cities and towns in Massachusetts managed their recreation

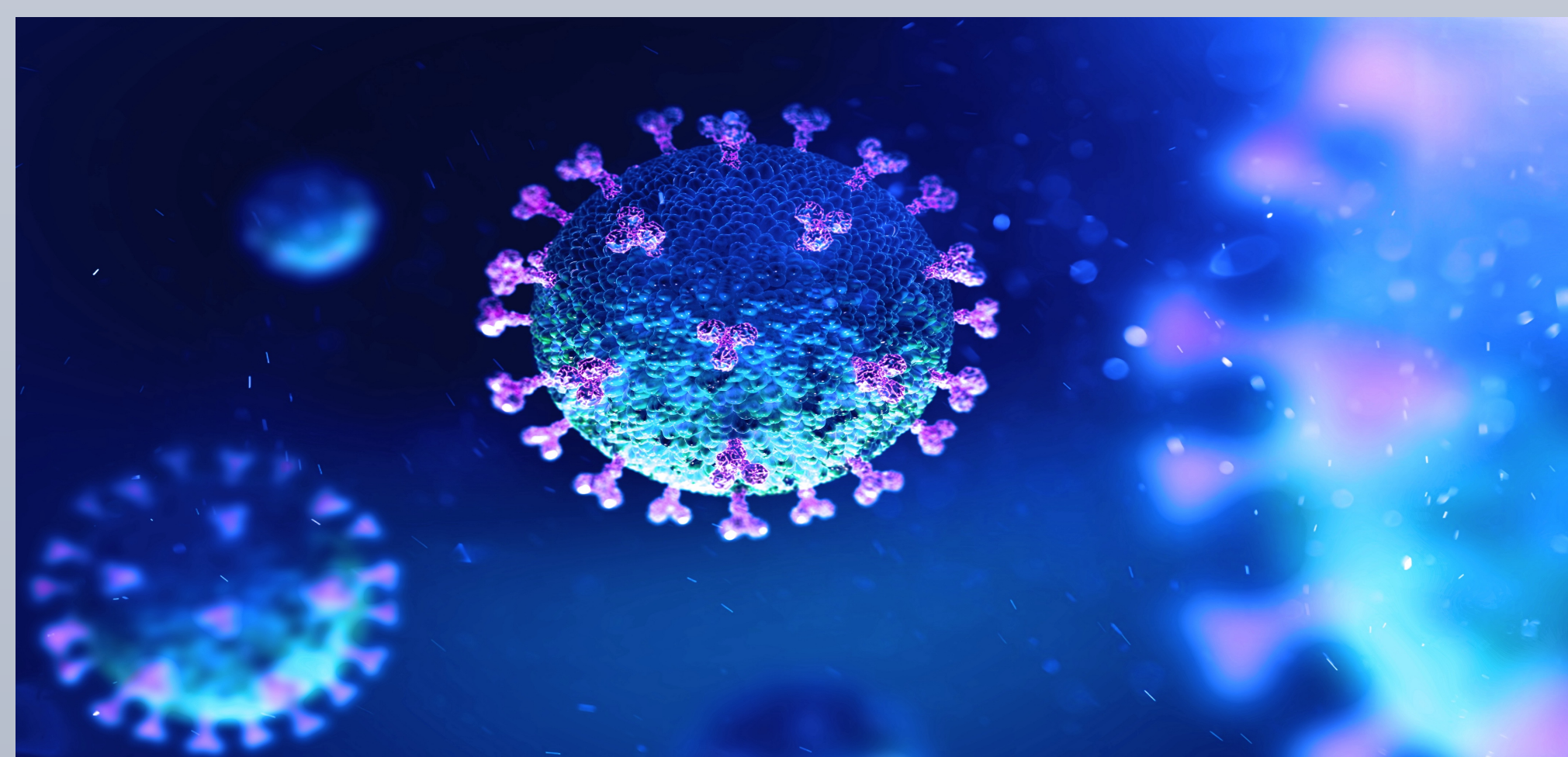


### Objectives

-Compare COVID protocols and procedures for recreation facilities in cities and towns in different areas of Massachusetts.

-Compare recreation programming offered during the COVID pandemic in rural and urban areas.

-Investigate whether recreational program budgeting in rural and urban areas is directly related to the programming provided.



### Methods

- A pool of rural and urban cities and towns in Massachusetts was identified.

- A series of towns and cities were identified for comparisons from nearby areas as well from a list of rural towns selected at random.

- A review of each city or towns' park and recreation was conducted to identify common types of programming and to review COVID 19 prevention policies and guidelines.

- Telephone interviews with programming managers were also conducted to learn more about what has affected programming most during the COVID 19 pandemic.

-Utilizing the creation of an after-school program, assess what kinds of needs would be warranted for maintaining the program, while in keeping with COVID 19 prevention guidelines placed by the state.

### Results

- The Results from the pool samples vary in some areas. Social factors and effects varied because of COVID 19. Some of the social factors that were not included were the increase in private recreation and purchasing of privately owned equipment and services. During 2020 there was a significant increase in people using national parks and reserves which created a new wave in outdoor recreation.

- Certain rural areas that lean more on tourism to attract customers were impacted more significantly with reprogramming, termination, or limitation of certain parts of their programming.

- Heavily influenced tourist areas like Nantucket, and Provincetown reshaped their programs due to COVID 19. As a result of the pandemic minimal contact has been allowed which reduced the large number of people in programs. While this is not significant in other towns in Massachusetts; it is very important to these communities specifically because they rely on tourism more for their recreation needs.

- Unlike coastal towns, urban areas also saw a change in programming, however it was not as extensive or substantial. There was a significant switch to remote programming and limited availability for some activities; such as online bingo.

- All towns and cities followed and continue to follow COVID 19 prevention guidelines and protocols set by the State.

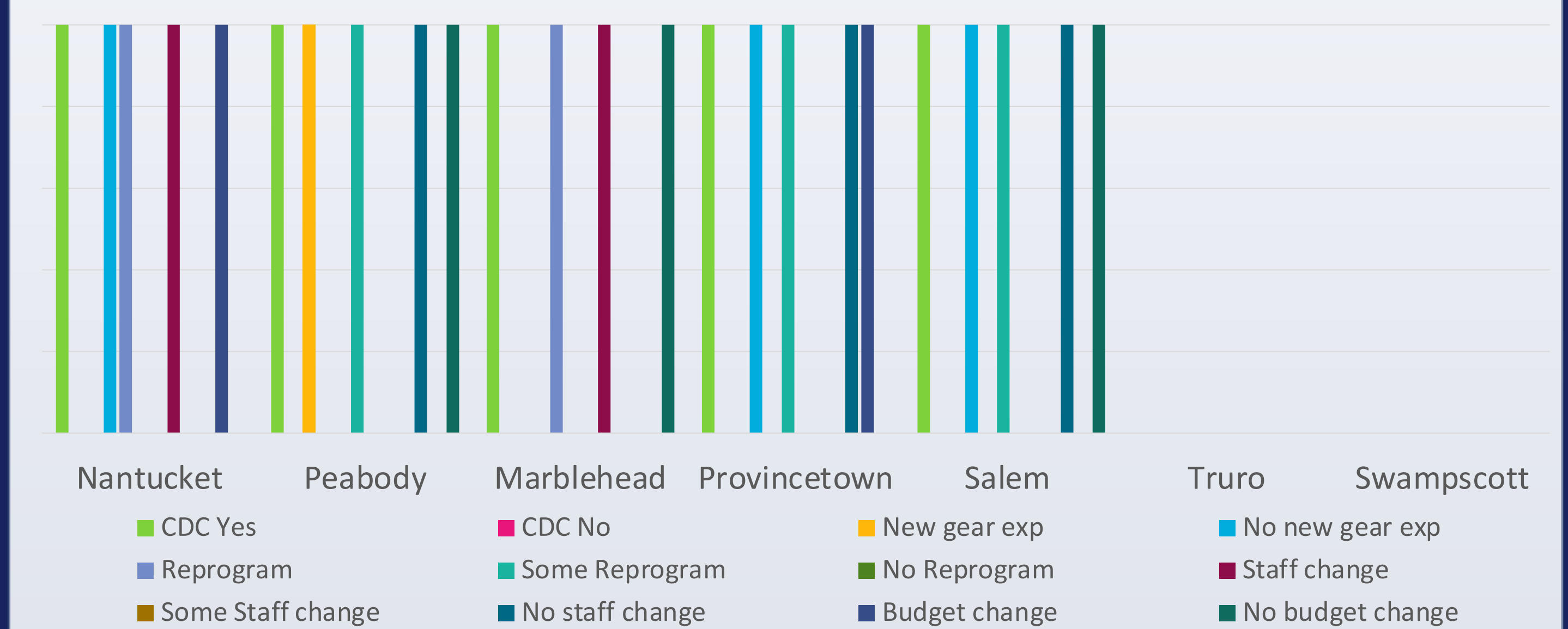
- Some towns concentrated their recreation programming to children and seniors.

- Reprogramming varied for all towns, with 2020 being the most difficult year because the pandemic had just begun and towns were readjusting their programming possibilities within COVID 19 prevention guidelines and protocols.

- Fig 1 displays answers that were given by each city within the data pool. From this graph we can see that at least three show reprogramming status. Fig 1 also shows that there were towns that were included within the pool but that did not participate in data collection.

### Results (cont)

Telephone Interview Results Fig 1



### Conclusions

Because of COVID 19 there has been an increase in recreation needs. Examples of this included the increase in purchasing of recreation items like bicycles and kayaks. The significant increases in recreation gear and activity vending has made parks and outdoor activities more desirable than prior to the pandemic.

Programming has also been more focused on the needs of younger children and seniors, with many communities tailoring programs solely to these populations. Changes in COVID 19 prevention practices have also occurred like not using a mask in outdoor activities. This has only been possible with vaccination availability and protocols will continue to evolve as we move through the pandemic.

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