



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: August 8, 2025

Location: Select Board Chambers and via Zoom

Members: Tejal K. Gandhi, MD, MPH; Stephen Epstein, MD, MPP, Member; Robert A. Partridge, MD, MPH, Member; Edward Cosgrove, PhD (Chair); Aarti Sawant-Basak, PhD (Vice Chair)

Staff Present: Timothy Muir McDonald, Director of Health and Human Services; Tara Gurge, Assistant Director of Public Health; Sai Palani; Ginnie Chacon-Lopez; Jenn Gangadharan; Julie McCarthy; Karen Shannon; Lydia Cunningham; Taleb Abdelrahim

Welcome & Public Comment Period

Dr. Cosgrove called the meeting to order at 9:00AM.

According to Chapter 107 of the Acts of 2022, as an act relative to extending certain states of emergency accommodations, as passed by the General Court, and signed into law by Acting Governor Karyn Polito, on July 16, 2022, revised Section 20 of Chapter 20, the Acts of 2021. In so doing, provided modifications to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, which allow for flexibility to hold remote only, and hybrid meetings, while preserving public access and, where appropriate, public participation.

There was no public comment at this time.

Review of minutes – June 20, 2025

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Gandhi, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes June 20, 2025, as presented. Motion passed by roll call: Epstein – aye; Cosgrove – aye; Gandhi – aye; and Partridge – abstain; 3-0-1.

Public Hearing – Article 1: Regulation Affecting Smoking and the Sales and Distribution of Tobacco Products in Needham

The Board opened the public hearing at 9:10am.

Dr. Sawant-Basak entered the meeting at 9:10am.

Mr. McDonald explained that no additional documentation or comment was received between the last meeting and this one.

The Board reviewed the draft language and made an amendment to Section G.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Epstein, and seconded by Dr. Partridge, it was voted that the Board of Health close the hearing and adopt the proposed amendments to Article 1, as amended. Motion passed by roll call: Epstein – aye; Cosgrove – aye; Gandhi – aye; Sawant-Basak – aye; and Partridge – aye; 5-0.

Synthetic Turf Re-testing – Results and Discussion

Mr. McDonald explained that this is a follow-up to the last Board of Health meeting presentation given by representatives with Fuss & O'Neill. The Board asked Fuss & O'Neill to add confidence interval data to the arsenic chart that was shared during the presentation. For arsenic, the reporting limit (RL) was 3.35, the excess lifetime cancer risk (ELCR) was 2.5, and the method detection limit (MDL) for this method is 0.5. The arsenic samples were below the MDL, which is why they are considered estimates and confidence intervals cannot be created. The MDL is lower than the ELCR, so the sample is below the cancer risk level.

Dr. Epstein asked what the units being discussed are. Staff stated that this seems unclear. Dr. Gandhi stated that the report seems incomplete, as it does not contain all of the information that the Board requested.

Mr. McDonald said that staff would communicate with Fuss & O'Neill and the lab which carried out the study, and request that lab staff attend the Board's next meeting to clarify these items.

Respiratory Vaccine Recommendations for 2025 – 2026 Season

Staff reviewed the recent upheaval at the CDC, particularly regarding the replacement of members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and weakening vaccine recommendations. Staff suggested that the Board of Health discuss the importance of vaccination for both individual and public health, and support vaccine recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Physicians.

Dr. Epstein suggested that the Board wait to hear the recommendations from The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) which should be released on the 13th.

Mr. McDonald stated that there is also a concern as to what should be ordered for vaccines this year. Dr. Gandhi said that the Board could put out a memo that it is following a science-based approach and reinforcing that the Board believes vaccinations are valuable to the public.

The Board agreed that it would issue a statement regarding the importance of vaccinations pending additional information.

May & June Staff Reports

Environmental Health – Sainath Palani & Tara Gurge

- Mr. Palani stated that two interns helped create informational materials about risk factor interventions. This information will be distributed to local restaurants.
- Ms. Gurge reported that Pamela Ross-Kung's last day as part-time inspector was on June 30th. Ms. Ross-Kung will still assist with trainings this fall.
- Ms. Gurge also stated that staff intend to adopt the FDA 2022 Food Code next year. Classes on the new food code will be offered in January.

Accreditation – Mr. McDonald

- Mr. McDonald stated that the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) provided feedback on the submitted documents. These documents were amended and resubmitted. There should be a site visit scheduled after Labor Day.

Traveling Meals – Ms. Gurge for Rebecca Hall

- Ms. Gurge stated that Ms. Hall attended a mental health first aid training for older adults and alerted the public that new summer drivers will be starting with the program.
- Mr. McDonald noted that the Town will be moving forward with the design of some renovations at the Center at the Heights, including a redesigned kitchen. There will need to be a study of projected operational costs to run the program from the Center's kitchen.

Regional Substance Use – Lydia Cunningham

- Ms. Cunningham stated that FY26 and 27 contract for BSAS was received at \$125,000 per year. The contract was executed and began July 1st.
- An annual regional meeting was held in June.

Substance Use Prevention: Needham - Karen Shannon

- Ms. Shannon talked about outreach in the community during May and June.
- Staff participated in a panel at the elementary school regarding technology and social media through the view of The Anxious Generation book.
- The Needham Overdose Awareness Day Vigil is being planned for August 28th.
- Angi MacDonnell, Peer Recovery Coach, worked with 8 people.
- Narcan training continues.
- SALSA leaders Kate Black, Isabel Tashie, Luca Pannozzo, Hayden Krug, and Jackie Lancaster were invited to the MA State House to speak with Becca Rausch about issues important to Needham youth. The SALSA youth prevention advocates discussed alcohol policy, nicotine pouches, vaping, and opioid awareness.
- Mr. McDonald stated that he and Ms. Shannon attended a Select Board meeting regarding an alcohol hearing for an underaged sale. The repercussions included three- and four-day suspensions of the business' alcohol sales.

Public Health Preparedness – Taleb Abdelrahim

- Mr. Abdelrahim reported that a survey was sent to 109 volunteers and 35 responses were received. These results will help to improve planning in the future.

- In June, Mr. Abdelrahim completed and submitted documents that were revised to meet the accreditation requirements.

Epidemiology – Julie McCarthy

- Ms. McCarthy stated that Mass DPH has started data collection for the respiratory virus season. COVID-19 in wastewater remains low but the numbers anecdotally appear to be ramping up.
- Sunscreen dispensers were installed at Rosemary Pool, DeFazio Park, and the Town Common. Improvements this year included foot pedal dispensers which are easier to place, move, and maintain, and sunscreen that is easier to apply and goes on clear. Ms. McCarthy has received positive feedback from residents about the improvements and new location.
- Rat sightings are being mapped.
- The heat map will be used to find problem areas in Town.
- Data from emergency departments across Massachusetts show that patients reporting exposure to ticks is higher than it has been in the last three years. Diagnosis of tick-borne disease is also higher than at the same time during the last three years. MDPH sent a clinical advisory on tick bite prophylaxis and staff are working on additional education information.

Nursing - Ginnie Chacon-Lopez

- Ms. Chacon-Lopez stated that staff are working on getting criteria 9 (AED integration) accomplished.
- Five camps have been licensed thus far.

Public Health Excellence – Mr. McDonald for Kerry Dunnell

- Mr. McDonald stated that there are two vacancies in the Shared Service team.

Other Items

None at this time.

Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove, and seconded by Dr. Gandhi, it was voted to adjourn the meeting. Roll Call Vote: Epstein – aye; Partridge – aye; Cosgrove – aye; Gandhi – aye; and Sawant-Basak – aye; Motion passed 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15AM.

Attachment:

August 8, 2025, meeting packet