



NEEDHAM PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: July 28, 2020

Location: Remote via Zoom per Governor Charles Baker's COVID-19 Executive Order 3/12/2020

Members: Kathleen Ward Brown, ScD, Chair
Edward Cosgrove, PhD, Member
Stephen Epstein, MD, MPP, Member
Christina S. Mathews, MPH, Member
Robert A. Partridge, MD, MPH, Vice Chair

Staff Present: Taleb Abdelrahim, Emergency Management Intern
Diana Acosta, Environmental Health Agent
Zendilli Depina, Substance Use Prevention Intern
Maryanne Dinell, Traveling Meals Program Coordinator
Tara Gurge, Assistant Director of the Public Health Division
Katie Kemen, interim Emergency Management Administrator
Timothy Muir McDonald, Director of Health & Human Services
Carol Read, Senior Substance Use Prevention Program Coordinator
Lynn Schoeff, Public Health Accreditation Coordinator
Karen Shannon, Senior Substance Use Prevention Program Coordinator
Tiffany Zike, Public Health Nurse

Dr. Kathleen Brown called the meeting to order at 9:03 and introduced the members of the Board of Health, staff, and guests via roll call.

The meeting is being conducted remotely using Zoom consistent with Governor Baker's March 12 order regarding to COVID-19. The materials for this meeting were circulated previously and are available on the Town website. All votes will be voice votes by roll call

Dr. Brown asked for a review of the minutes from the May 12th meeting. There were no comments. **Dr. Epstein made a motion to accept the minutes. Dr. Partridge seconded. The vote to accept the minutes was unanimous.**

Staff reports:

Public Health Nursing – Tiffany Zike

Ms. Zike has been focused almost exclusively on the COVID-19 response. With Donna Carmichael's retirement in June and with the remaining part-time nurse leaving on August 14, the Public Health Nursing unit is extremely short-staffed.



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COVID-19 numbers for June included 328 confirmed, 42 probable, and 15 suspect cases with 242 contacts according to MAVEN, the state's communicable disease tracker. However, MAVEN does not reflect the actual number of contacts which are consistently much higher.

Other communicable diseases included a few campylobacter infections, with two from the same restaurant. Ms. Zike and Ms. Acosta worked with the restaurant to follow up on sanitary practices.

June also saw the start of the EEE discussions between the Mass Department of Public Health and local health departments.

Ms. Zike and Mr. McDonald are working very closely with the School Department in anticipation of the flu season compounding the effects of COVID.

In response to a question about increased tick-borne diseases compared with previous years, particularly HGA (Human granulocytic anaplasmosis) and babesiosis, Ms. Zike reported that most of the babesiosis cases are from out of state and from the Cape.

Traveling Meals – Maryanne Dinell

There are currently five summer staff members who are job sharing for meal delivery. Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital-Needham is still packing the meals according to their protocol. There are approximately 50 people on the program.

Substance Use Prevention – Karen Shannon

The Prevention Team has been busy in June. Ms. Shannon filed for a no-cost extension of the Drug Free Communities grant. Ms. Shannon is working on getting the new vaping prevention work going and posting the position for that grant-funded project. The team developed a substance use prevention PSA for the Needham channel and another PSA in the continuing effort to publicize available supportive services. SALSA teens have completed 4 projects, including engaging with rising 9th graders, vaping prevention, and producing PSAs.

The Public Health Division has launched a racial equity committee that includes the other divisions in Health and Human Services, to evaluate the way we do our work in terms of racial equity and to identify changes that should be made.

There was a brief interchange about whether teens' use of vaping products might be decreasing as they are home more, but that may be mitigated by the enormous increase in stress teens are experiencing, as reported by Sara Shine, the Director of Youth and Family Services.

Environmental Health – Tara Gurge and Diana Acosta

There has been an uptick in complaints about people not wearing masks. Ms. Gurge and Ms. Acosta continue to educate restaurants and their staff about wearing masks and social distancing. Ms. Gurge gave the owner of Café Fresh Bagel talking points to help encourage customers to wear masks. Ms. Acosta is working with the owner of Kostas to make sure the staff are wearing masks and wearing



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them properly. Paige Lambert, an intern, is working on a PSA regarding masks and distributing information about the Board of Health order. Ms. Gurge said that the current effort is much like the educational campaign from many years ago about wearing gloves to prevent bare-hand contact.

Ms. Acosta said that many of the complaint calls are about customers not wearing masks rather than about restaurant staff. The workers find themselves in uncomfortable positions, asking customers to comply with the mask order, particularly if a customer is already agitated. Ms. Gurge urges the staff to use their best judgement in those instances. The Board had a brief discussion about how an employee who is unable to wear a mask for medical reasons might wear a face shield. Face shields are not an adequate substitute for masks, but they are better than nothing.

Ms. Gurge reported on the progress they are making on the FDA standards. They have made headway on FDA Standard 7 (industry and community relations). Ms. Lambert is working with Donna Moulthrop and Ruth Clay from North Shore health departments on Standard 7. Ms. Gurge said that they are also making progress on FDA Standard 2 (trained regulatory staff). Environmental Health staff will be doing some shadowing with restaurant staff to make visits standardized.

All pools have been permitted other than the one at Rosemary Ridge which has decided not to open. Ms. Acosta met with all pool managers to review state regulations. Many hired additional staff for cleaning and monitoring the number of people coming in. Most are using a reservation system to control for social distancing and for cleaning. The Town pool opened this week after a long period of a lot of hard work. The hotels are planning to open indoor pools within the next two weeks.

COVID-19 status update

Ms. Zike reported that she ran the usual report of confirmed cases. Needham had flattened by the end of May and total cases per day had decreased. Quarantine and isolation stayed the same through June. However, there has been an increase in confirmed and probable cases in July.

Ms. Zike looked at other aspects of the data to understand the demographics of probable and confirmed cases (refer to Ms. Zike's slides). Long term care accounts for the largest number of cases in older adults. But, when long term care cases are excluded from the totals, the numbers of under 20-year-olds jump from 5% to 10% and the older age group gets significantly smaller. The race breakdown of confirmed cases is available only outside long-term care sites. Gender breakdown stays much the same at close to 50-50, but with females slightly higher.

Ms. Zike explained how "probable" and "confirmed" are determined. There are three types of tests: PCR, antigen, and antibody. The only test that is considered definitive for confirmed cases is the PCR. Antigen and antibody, even if positive, are only counted as probable. However, a positive antigen test, even if followed by a negative PCR, is still required to isolate. When people have a negative antigen test, they must follow up with PCR. This complicates reporting numbers. People with positive antigens are treated as if they are positive but they are not counted in the case numbers unless it has been confirmed by PCR. Positive antibodies with no symptoms in the last 14 days does not require isolation. As of last week, Needham had 341 confirmed, but as of the end of June, Needham had 404



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confirmed and probable cases. Several of the positive antigens that also tested negative with PCR have all come from the same facility. Ms. Zike brought this to the State to investigate.

Needham Public Health is receiving many questions from the public about testing and about quarantine after travel. The Division is waiting to hear from the State about how local health departments will be expected to enforce travel-related quarantine. Police will not play a role in enforcement. They will only respond if public health staff members are in danger.

Colleges may do their own contact tracing but must coordinate with the local health department. The Communicable Tracing Collaborative staff keeps changing. They often refer contact tracing within long term care facilities back to the local health department. There appears to be a reemergence in long term care.

The Division is beginning to plan flu clinics. There will be an increased the supply of flu vaccine and the plan is to run the clinics as drive-through, possibly in partnership with other towns. Ms. Zike is concerned that she will be unable to do both the flu clinics and COVID management without additional nursing help.

In response to a question about the increased July numbers Ms. Zike said that most are due to travel and some to gathering in indoor summer programs. These have been mostly antigen tests. Dr. Partridge pointed out that this may be a harbinger for the schools in the fall.

Mr. McDonald said that the ban on reusable bags has been lifted by the state. The Board of Health may consider whether to follow suit.

Mr. McDonald reported that the division has received many complaints about face coverings, mostly about non-compliance, which is stretching staff beyond current capacity to respond and investigate. Historically the division has not been involved in private residence issues other than for code violations. Ms. Gurge and Ms. Acosta distribute signs and educational material about social distancing and wearing masks but cannot respond to complaints. Staff can't issue tickets unless they witness the violation in person.

The State has revised voting rules in anticipation of the upcoming elections on September 1 (primary) and November 3, allowing "no-excuse" absentee voting. After a brief discussion including concerns that the Town works out some problems that occurred with the Town elections, the Board decided to write a letter to the public promoting absentee voting from the public health perspective.

Hearing on face covering emergency order:

The hearing was opened at 9:50. Since this is part of the emergency order, there is no public comment. However, there was extensive public comment on the original order.

Mr. McDonald presented changes in the edited version given to the Board of Health. There is some clarification regarding locations in business where face coverings are not required, such as a private



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office that is not shared with other people. The website has been updated to reflection changes in the state guidance, including maximum occupancy for retail establishments and reusable bags. Mr. McDonald has also edited the letter to clarify when to wear masks outdoors.

The Board agreed with the edits. Dr. Partridge asked for clarification of the word “access” in the context of “access and functional needs”. Dr. Epstein would like it to state that although reusable bags are now permitted, establishments should continue to offer single-use bags at no cost to the consumer.

Dr. Partridge made a motion to accept the letter with the edits discussed. Dr. Epstein seconded. Dr. Cosgrove abstained because he missed part of the discussion. All four other Board members voted in favor of the motion.

Other business:

Public signs related to COVID

Mr. McDonald said that two signs at Memorial Park which thank people for wearing masks were developed with the help of Cyndi Gonzalez, the Public Information Officer.

The Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce has asked for signs that would help businesses enforce face covering. Such a sign would say “You must wear a mask to enter this business per order of the Board of Health. If someone is unable to comply for medical reasons, please call or email us.” (The establishment would include their number and email in a space provided for that purpose). Such a sign will help to take some of the burden off the business owner and employees.

Needham Public Schools

Mr. McDonald and Ms. Zike, as well as Ms. Mathews, are serving on an advisory committee for reopening the schools. Ms. Zike is also meeting regularly with the School Physician, Dr. Alan Stern, and with the Director of School Health Services, Barbara Singer.

Mr. McDonald had requested a modeling of air flow on school buses to determine what effect reduced student load has on air quality and Mr. McDonald said the study was fairly revealing. The Harvard School of Public Health has also done modeling in classrooms and the results should be received later this week. The teachers’ union is raising concerns regarding spacing, cleaning, and air flow.

Managing air flow is very challenging because there are so many different air handling systems and conditions throughout the system, even within one school. Dr. Epstein said this is critical because indoor activity creates the highest risk. Dr. Epstein also suggested that there should be attention paid to the Mitchell School which does not have air conditioning. Portable HEPAs will have to be used in certain spaces, although outdoor air is best.

The MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) changed its recommendations for spacing within classrooms from 6 feet to 3 feet. Staff are questioning the change since the MA Department of Public Health still advises 6 feet distance for dining, even in outdoor venues.



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School districts have been told to prepare three scenarios: everyone in-school, everyone at home, and a hybrid model where only a portion of people are in school and may include rotating people in person and online learning. Mr. McDonald said that, given the superintendent's focus on the health of students and staff, all in-person seems unlikely for Needham. The School Department is still working on developing details for a hybrid plan. Ms. Mathews reported that a recent zoom call was attended by over 1000 parents.

Diversity and equity letter from the Board of Health

Dr. Brown and Ms. Mathews drafted a letter to the public to about the Board's support for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and about how race affects social determinants of health. The letter also includes a cautionary statement about wearing masks while exercising first amendment rights (protesting for Black Lives Matters) in consideration of public health and disease prevention. Mr. McDonald presented the draft letter with edits from him and from Board members.

Evidence from other cities indicate that the protests have not been spreader events. Given that, and the fact that the division is very low staffed (missing 4-5 people), Public Health may be able to provide only limited support in the form of guidance to the organizers and possibly some masks. Mr. McDonald suggested including the following, "... with sufficient notice, Public Health will attempt to provide face covering. However, our supply is limited, and the expectation is that people will provide their own."

[There followed a discussion about current understaffing and how it would affect Division's ability to set up and run a socially distanced cooling center if the need arises in the middle of COVID response. The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) could be activated but low staffing will make it difficult to organize and structure the work of the MRC.]

Another edit to the letter will refer to the Health and Human Services Department racial equity committee.

Dr. Cosgrove made a motion to approve the letter with the edits. Dr. Partridge seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Goals and objectives

The Board had intended to discuss progress on its goals and objectives but determined there was not enough time left at this meeting. Each member will review the progress on existing goals and objectives, send comments to Mr. McDonald, and discuss at the next meeting.

Alcohol regulations

The Select Board is considering changes to the alcohol regulations and has already reduced the alcohol license fee. The Board of Health's concerns are primarily focused on penalties for violations.



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Mr. McDonald made the case for defined consistent penalties. Removing discretion in penalties and supporting clear, transparent, and fair penalties will lead to a much more equitable regulation. The Board of Health agreed.

Although the Select Board has not asked for feedback from the Board of Health, this is an opportunity to formally weigh in. Public Health already made progress in instituting alcohol compliance checks that mirror the longstanding tobacco compliance checks. The results of the alcohol compliance checks point toward the need for clearer, stronger penalties.

The Board recommends the following edits: 10.1 change “maybe” to “shall be” grounds for formal action. As a formal action it also becomes public, no longer swept under the table. And, 10.2 is very soft and offers too much discretion.

Ms. Read reported that the last alcohol compliance checks had to be cancelled due to COVID. Rather than continue to partner with police with the old model of compliance checks, Ms. Read is switching to non-police involvement alcohol purchase surveys.

Ms. Mathews asked about sharing data from the survey and compliance checks with the Select Board to help them understand how pervasive alcohol use is among our young people. Dr. Partridge said that underage drinking is a huge public health problem. As an emergency physician, Dr. Partridge sees a direct connection between underage drinking, trauma, violence, and sexual assault. He stressed the importance of sending a message to the Select Board about these significant issues.

Ms. Read offered to have Zendilli Depina present to the Board about Photo Voice, a project that provides feedback from teens about their perceptions regarding alcohol.

Dr. Brown said that the Board of Health should give formal feedback to the Select Board if not able to do a presentation

Meatless Monday

Dr. Brown was approached by the League of women voters about their Meatless Monday program. They would like the endorsement of the Board of Health.

Dr. Cosgrove moved to endorse Meatless Monday. Ms. Mathews seconded. The Board voted unanimously to endorse Meatless Monday.

Next meeting: Thursday, September 10, 9-10:30 am

Dr. Cosgrove moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:46. Dr. Partridge seconded. Unanimous vote to adjourn.