



NEEDHAM PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION



Board of Health Meeting Minutes

Date: January 14, 2021

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: Timothy M. McDonald, Director of Needham Department of Health and Human Services; Tara Gurge, Assistant Director of the Public Health Division; Carol Read; Diana Acosta; Maryanne Dinell; Maureen Doherty; Karen Shannon; Hannah Whitehead; Lynn Schoeff; and Hanna Burnett.

Mr. McDonald introduced the new staff member Hannah Whitehead. She was hired via a grant as a part-time epidemiologist. She has completed her master's degree in infectious diseases and has worked in women's health research. She was welcomed by the Board members.

Call to Order

Dr. Brown called the meeting to order at 9:01AM and initiated roll call. Present were Dr. Brown-Y, Dr. Cosgrove-Y, Ms. Matthews-Y and Dr. Partridge-Y. Absent was Dr. Epstein.

The meeting is being conducted remotely using Zoom consistent with Governor Baker's March 12th 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.

Approval of Minutes – December 10, 2020

Dr. Brown asked for a review of the minutes from the December meeting.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove and seconded by Ms. Matthews, it was unanimously voted to approve the above minutes. Dr. Brown-Y, Dr. Cosgrove-Y, Ms. Matthews-Y and Dr. Partridge-Y. Motion passed 4-0.

Staff Reports

Travelling Meals – Maryanne Dinell

Ms. Dinell reported that meal delivery numbers remain the same. One volunteer is unavailable because a family member tested positive for COVID. A consumer has also tested positive and upon the consumer's request, meals are delivered to the door and left by signal of the doorbell. Mr. McDonald noted that this arrangement is different than normal in that delivery drivers also perform an unofficial



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wellness safety check. Ms. Dinell reiterated that this “no-visual” drop-off arrangement was at the consumer request, and that Ms. Dinell will communicate with her by telephone only.

Environmental Health – Tara Gurge and Diana Acosta

Ms. Gurge reported that mask complaints were down from twenty-seven to six since last month.

She also reported that an emergency housing inspection request had been made by the Needham Police with regard to a housing code violation (extreme hoarding and unsanitary conditions) for a resident at the Residence Inn. Ms. Gurge and Building Commissioner David Roche met with the hotel manager and the resident’s representative. The resident was transferred to medical care and released, and subsequently referred for supportive services and meal delivery from Travelling Meals. Ms. Gurge is in contact with the manager who checks in with the resident daily. Ms. Acosta added that a permanent housing plan is being pursued. It is a complicated case requiring close follow-up with social workers. Mr. McDonald noted that efforts continue to be made to get the services the client needs. The agency that provides elder-at-risk services is Springwell, and it remains imperative to work closely with that agency to provide solutions in the best interest of the client.

Ms. Gurge reported that the Building Department refers tent permit requests to her so that she can advise owners of COVID protocols and limits of ten persons.

Ms. Acosta reported permits are completed for reopening of establishments and she is following up with those who have not submitted. She also reported that a blanket email was received from a group declaring the Governor’s COVID enforcement unconstitutional.

A baseball field had been closed since it was not COVID compliant. The YMCA on Chestnut St. is also closed.

Policies and Accreditation – Lynn Schoeff

Ms. Schoeff reported that a grant has been received to fund a new van for Aging Services. Mr. McDonald suggested that the Board’s efforts to obtain these grants be shared with the Finance Committee. Instead of budgeting \$70K in the fleet replacement line item, the town pays \$12-15K with the state paying remaining 80%.

Ms. Schoeff also reported that she is working on the Annual Report.

Substance Use Prevention – Karen Shannon

Ms. Shannon reported that the quarterly meeting of SCAN was graced with Zendilli Depina’s presentation on the PhotoVoice project, which highlights the youth perspective on alcohol.

Other areas Ms. Shannon is working on are contracting services for youth and parent focus groups; training and development of SALSA youth on presentation skills used to interact with media; and training for coalition. These projects are made possible through SAMSHA Drug-Free Communities grants.



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Other initiatives include partnering with neighboring Natick 180 coalition on cannabis education of parents and presentations to support parents concerned about children's abuse of substances. She is also working to adapt mental health first aid program from in-person to instructor-led virtual program.

Emergency Management – Taleb Abdelrahim

In Mr. Abdelrahim's absence due to clinic responsibilities, Mr. McDonald reported Medical Reserve Corps volunteers continue to step forward with two-three assigned per clinic, and Mr. Abdelrahim continues to recruit new volunteers.

COVID Update

Mr. McDonald updated the Board on the COVID presentation he made to the Select Board on January 12th (see attached PowerPoint presentation.) He meets with teachers and staff every Monday from 5:30-7:00PM to review current data, compliance, and consideration of risk level. Outside experts and various speakers are invited to attend.

Topics include the following (see attached PowerPoint presentation for actual compilation of data):

- a) The three metrics that inform reopening and closing of schools.
 - a. Average daily cases in Needham.
 - b. Positivity rate.
 - c. Needham Public Schools safety protocols adherence.
- b) Local, county and state level data.
- c) New revised state criteria for community risk – currently in “yellow” but trending upward.
- d) At-a-glance Needham and surrounding areas.
- e) Statewide risk map.
- f) Age breakdown – December 20-January 2.
- g) Age breakdown – academic year to date.
- h) Average daily cases per 100K.
- i) State calculated positive testing rate.
- j) Needham case clusters December 2020: household, daycare, congregate care, sports.

Ms. Whitehead then presented the Needham COVID-19 monthly case report - December 20.

Topics include the following (see attached PowerPoint presentation for actual compilation of data):

- a) Daily and cumulative confirmed cases.
- b) Confirmed and probable cases.
- c) Cumulative cases by age group (confirmed and probable).
- d) Monthly cases by age group (confirmed and probable.)
- e) Monthly confirmed cases by gender.
- f) Rolling 7-day average (confirmed and probable.)
- g) December COVID-19 cases.
- h) Gender breakdown in December cases.
- i) Age distribution of December cases.
- j) Clusters in December.



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Discussion ensued including the following highlights. There is a need to repurpose funds to hire part-time contact tracers. The high increase in cases of 5-19 age group are mostly symptomatic, and the breakdown of this age group is 25 elementary, 14 middle school, and 36 high school. Contact tracing reveals that transmission is not in a controlled school cluster but in the higher risk household clusters. It is imperative to continue to make efforts to educate parents and students on assessing risk behaviors. There were approximately 20 COVID confirmed cases among teachers over the academic semester.

Discussion also ensued with regard to testing including the following highlights. The Needham Fire Dept will be testing workplace exposure in Town and school buildings on regular afternoon hours. Different randomized testing options in schools, including pool testing, are being considered. There are significant coordination demands on staff and sustaining cost of testing programs. A full-fledged testing program in schools for staff newly hired and possibly volunteers would be approximately \$800K for two-week period. At a time when Town revenues are decreasing, the impact of further testing costs on the Town budget are of concern. Investment in the schools has already been made in the upgrading of air filtration HVAC systems and HEPA filters. It was agreed that there is a secondary positive effect of testing on self-awareness of behavior and on sustaining hybrid models of remote learning. While the initial state six-week vaccine program is free, the town pays the costs thereafter. The School Committee is in the process of deciding on whether to enroll in the state's six-week program. Further discussion of all parties needs to consider the cost and sustainability of the testing program.

Mr. McDonald noted that the School Committee is concerned about the social-emotional impact and mental health needs of students in remote learning. It was found that the challenges on youngest students for remote learning is higher than on older high school learners. The committee is interested in focusing on ways that facilitate more in-person learning, including the regular testing program piece.

Mr. McDonald noted the following grants received from March 2020 to date for public education, contact tracing and resource coordination:

- \$10K from MetroWest Health Foundation for resource coordination and volunteer recruitment.
- \$20K from MWHF for part-time epidemiologist (Hannah Whitehead).
- \$23,855 from MA Emergency COVID Fund.
- \$16,734 from MA Public Health Trust Fund for targeted ad campaign to middle and high school group to make good decisions to protect vulnerable relatives.
- \$1,500 from MA CARES Act for "wraps" around town fences with "be safe" theme.

Mr. McDonald noted that as of tomorrow all 210 vaccinations received will have been administered to first responders. His office continues to receive a high volume of calls and emails from concerned residents and professionals. He discussed the technological and communication problems encountered in the administration of vaccinations. He is bringing on additional staff to aid in customer service.

Mr. McDonald noted that the Aging Services Division has stepped up to adapt its programs during the pandemic. What were once congregate meals are now delivered, as well as grocery bags, to homes and payment on an ability to pay contribution from the consumer. Funds to offset the deficit are also needed for this critical program.



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Mr. McDonald noted that he has agreed with the state to vaccinate all persons, including 65+ age group, and “will find a way to pay for it.” He anticipated the program will be delineated on the town website with support for those without computer access. Mr. McDonald noted that MRC volunteers are being utilized for vaccinations, but he is sensitive to the fact that these volunteers, mostly Needham residents, have active primary responsibilities involved in COVID medical care. Funds for personnel to run these clinics is needed.

Ms. Read thanked Mr. McDonald and his team for expanding services to neighboring towns for administering the vaccinations, including her first responders in the Town of Medfield.

Board of Health Goals

Dr. Brown initiated discussion on the Board of Health Goals (see attached). Ms. Matthews noted the importance of incorporating racial and health equity considerations.

Mr. McDonald added that he would revise the document as noted.

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove and seconded by Dr. Partridge, it was unanimously voted to approve the Board of Health Goals as amended. Dr. Brown-Y, Dr. Cosgrove-Y, Ms. Matthews-Y and Dr. Partridge-Y. Motion passed 4-0.

Meeting Schedule

Following discussion, it was agreed an abbreviated meeting on COVID-related issues:

January 28 – 7:00-8:00AM

Regular meeting

February 4 or 5; 9:00-11:00AM

Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Dr. Cosgrove and seconded by Dr. Partridge, it was unanimously voted to approve the Board of Health Goals as amended. Dr. Brown-Y, Dr. Cosgrove-Y, Ms. Matthews-Y and Dr. Partridge-Y. Motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 10:55AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Martin Barraford

Attachments:

COVID Presentation to the Select Board

COVID Monthly Case Report

Public Health Division Goals