

2/4/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

I. **Welcome and Introduction:** VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- Welcome participants on the call.
- This is the weekly call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials.
- The next call will be on Thursday, February 11th at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, February 8th.
- The meeting invitations include a link to a survey we use to guide our talking points. The survey will only capture one question per response. To ask multiple questions, fill out the survey multiple times. The survey link will not change week to week.
- On today's call we will hear from DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie and Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch. In addition, we have Vermont League of Cities and Towns Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn and Vermont State Police Captain Mike Manley available to answer questions. We will be providing you all an overview of the State's response to COVID-19 and we will have time for additional questions at the end of the call.
- FAQs will be updated as needed and can be found at: <https://vem.vermont.gov/coronavirus>
- From this site you can also click on the "[Call Notes](#)" section on the left-hand side where we will post notes from this call. It will be added to the list of First Responder Notes.

AGENDA:

- I. **Intro/call format**
- II. **COVID-19/VDH overview**
- III. **SEOC overview/VEM comments**
- IV. **DFS Comments**
- V. **Q&A with participants**

II. **COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments:** HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

- **Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont**
 - There were 165 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday, which is typical of what we've seen recently.
 - The test percent positivity rate is 1.8%, trending downward from 2.2% last week and 2.5% the week prior.
 - There have been 175 deaths associated with COVID-19 in Vermont so far, including 1 yesterday.
 - 55 Vermonters are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, including 12 in intensive care and 0 on ventilators.
 - More Vermont COVID-19 statistics are available on the [Department of Health website](#).
 - The Department of Health is currently tracking 81 outbreaks across the state, including a fairly large outbreak at a university in Washington County which has 111 associated infections. The outbreak is contained to the university and does not represent a risk to the broader community. The Department of Health is sending staff to the university to assist.
 - We are now over a year into the COVID-19 activation of the Department of Health's Health Operations Center, which first partially activated on February 3rd, 2020.
- **Testing/tracing updates**
 - There are 21 COVID-19 testing sites open to the public today.
 - Times set aside for first responders continue to be available.
 - Any first response agency facing COVID-related operational difficulties should reach out to the Vermont Emergency Management Watch Officer, who will put the agency in touch with resources to help them navigate quarantines, exposures, etc.
- **Vaccination updates**
 - Department of Health COVID-19 vaccination clinics are ongoing, with help from public safety agency staff.

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- There were concerns about decreased hospital vaccine allotments for phase 1a vaccinations, but the allotments are back up. Any first response agency with responders needing vaccinations should reach out to their local hospital. The State is also working to match extra doses of vaccine to first responders who need it.
- The State is also continuing to vaccinate those in the 75 and up age band.
- Hospital partners begin vaccinations today, and the State will keep adding sites as allotments allow. The State is increasing its allotment to pharmacies.
- Vaccinations of homebound individuals will start tomorrow.
 - Initially, the following partnerships will administer vaccines: Caledonia Home Health Care & Hospice and CALEX Ambulance, Visiting Nurse & Hospice for Vermont and New Hampshire and Rescue Inc., and the Franklin County Home Health Agency and AmCare.
 - After the above agencies are up and running, the program will expand to encompass more organizations next week.
 - Homebound vaccinations will start with those who are 1) 75 or older, 2) in the care of home health agencies, and 3) federally qualified as homebound (i.e., physically unable to leave their residence). There are about 2,000 Vermonters in this category, and we're starting with them because it's easy to quantify.
 - We are aware that there are many homebound individuals 75 years old or older who are not in the care of a home health agency, and we want to get to them too. The Department of Health is working with primary care providers, Meals on Wheels, and the Department for Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living to identify eligible homebound individuals. There will also be a role for municipalities in this process.
 - The Department of Health plans on initiating a referral process for elderly homebound individuals (going through the organizations listed above), rather opening up public sign-ups. The challenge is to separate those who need a vaccine delivered to their residence from those who simply want one (i.e., who would be able to get to a distribution site).
- Planning for the next stages of vaccination are underway. The State anticipates staying within the age bands (75 and older, then 70-74, then 65-69), but will also make sure vaccines don't sit unused on shelves.
- So far, 57,051 Vermonters received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, including 22,775 people who received both doses. More data is available on [Vermont's COVID-19 vaccination dashboard](#).
- **EMS updates**
 - We appreciate how Vermont's EMS agencies are contributing to the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, as providers staff Department of Health district clinics and prepare for homebound vaccinations.
 - We all have COVID fatigue, but please stay safe, follow the PPE guidance, and take care of yourself.

III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- **SEOC status:** The SEOC remains activated every weekday from 0800 until 1600. On weekends the SEOC is in monitoring status, meaning the watch officer is the point of contact for any resource needs that arise. The SEOC is entirely virtual.
- **Policy updates:**
 - On Tuesday, the White House issued a [memorandum](#) announcing 100% federal share for certain FEMA-eligible COVID-19 costs, retroactive to the beginning of the pandemic.
 - Previously, there was a 25% local match requirement for FEMA funds, which this memorandum waives.

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- Many governors, including Phil Scott, requested this measure since midyear 2020, with no response from the federal government until now.
- We are currently awaiting more detailed guidance from FEMA on how this will impact Vermont, but overall it is a big deal for the state budget.
- However, this memorandum will not change much for local government (including first response agencies), because the State has already been issuing grants which cover 100% of eligible costs submitted.
- Yesterday, the governor signed [legislation](#) extending Act 150's COVID-19 worker's compensation measures. Specifically, death or disability resulting from COVID-19 shall be covered by worker's compensation until 30 days after the state of emergency ends.
- Governor Scott announced yesterday that the recent federal coronavirus relief act [includes more than \\$26 million to support public transit](#) in Vermont. The funds can cover 100% of the cost of public transit operations and vehicles.
 - The Agency of Transportation plans to use the funds to purchase PPE, sanitize buses, replace up to 30 buses, launch energy-efficient projects, and construct office space near Rutland.
- Last week, ACCD released [guidance for annual town meetings](#), strongly discouraging in-person meetings and instead encouraging mail-in voting through Australian ballot. On Wednesday, February 8th at 10:00am, ACCD will be discussing that guidance during a Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) weekly webinar. You can register at the [VLCT website](#).
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - The SEOC continues to support COVID-19 vaccine operations and send PPE to health care organizations in urgent need.
 - Using the recent survey of the vaccination status of Vermont's first response agencies, the Safety and Security Branch of the SEOC is matching COVID-19 vaccination opportunities with first responders yet to receive the vaccine.
 - On Friday, the Vermont Foodbank and the Agency of Human Services were notified that the Farmers to Families Food Box program vendor for Vermont will distribute food boxes for February by partnering with the faith-based organization City Serve, instead of using the state's established distribution system.
 - The SEOC and the Foodbank are working to identify the contractor's plan for March and April distribution, and will see if the Foodbank can be a partner in those efforts.
 - Through City Serve, three faith-based organizations in Vermont were selected to assist in the distribution of food boxes for Vermont: Cornerstone Community Church in Milton, Vibrant Church in South Burlington, and Roadside Chapel in Rutland.
 - This past weekend, distribution began at the Vibrant Church in South Burlington and will continue this Saturday, February 6th. More information can be found on the [church's website](#).

IV. Division of Fire Safety: Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch

- The results from the latest fire department capabilities survey are much like those from the last 2 surveys, indicating that Vermont's fire departments remain in a good position.
 - 7% of counties reported challenges with responder availability due to COVID concerns, such as exposures. This percentage has been stable over recent surveys.
 - Departments are operating normally or with minimal adjustments. In the last survey, it was reported that 1 department was using automatic mutual aid due to quarantining responders. That issue was resolved, and no similar situations are currently occurring.

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- 38% of counties reported COVID-19 exposures within the last 2 weeks, mostly related to community or family exposures (as opposed to at the workplace).
- No counties reported a need for additional resources now or in near future.
- The fire department capabilities survey will now go out every 3 weeks (instead of every 2 weeks), with the next survey going out on February 18th. The Division of Fire Safety will change the frequency of the survey as warranted.
- This week, the Division of Fire Safety heard concerns about vaccinated responders not following COVID-19 mitigation guidance. The Division will stress the importance of still following guidance, including for PPE.
- The Division of Fire Safety is ending its weekly situation reports, and will instead send out information as the need arises. If there is ever a need to return to regular reporting, the Division will do so. Division staff will continue to remain available for COVID-19 questions/needs.

V. Questions from Call Participants

- The State maintains a PPE warehouse, called the Medical Counter Measures (MCM) Warehouse, from which healthcare providers and first responders can request PPE for emergent needs.
 - The intent is not to backfill normal supply, but rather is for when the supply chain is constrained and an organization needs some extra PPE while they find a new supplier. Organizations can also tap into the MCM Warehouse supply if a specific situation is raising its PPE burn rate.
 - To request PPE from the MCM Warehouse, fill out [this form](#). The form includes questions about PPE burn rate, COVID-19 exposures, etc., so be prepared to answer those sorts of questions.
- Fire departments and EMS agencies should continue to adhere to the [guidance on non-emergency activities](#) last updated in November. Training should be virtual unless it's critically important to be in person (e.g., orientation on a new piece of equipment). In-person training, when necessary, should be in groups of less than 10 people in a well-ventilated space.
 - The Division of Fire Safety and the Department of Health are looking into how this guidance may change as first responders receive COVID-19 vaccinations.
- Municipalities and first response agencies looking for hard-to-obtain PPE (such as medical-grade N95 masks) can use [State contracts](#) for those items. Some of these contracts require a large purchase so it may be advisable to combine purchases – unfortunately the State cannot put in an order on behalf of municipalities. Organizations with emergent PPE needs should fill out [this form](#).