

6/4/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Outline and Talking Points

I. **Welcome and Introduction:** Deputy Commissioner Chris Herrick

- This is the weekly call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials.
 - 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.
 - Last week, we added a question to the survey about the longevity of these calls and whether they are meeting your needs. We will be keeping those questions in the survey this week, so please respond to the survey if you would like to provide feedback on how often these calls should occur.
 - Given the responses we've received thus far, there is support to keep these calls on a weekly schedule.
 - Today's call features Congressman Peter Welch, who will provide an update on federal assistance for municipalities.
 - On today's call we will also hear from Department of Health Deputy Commissioner Tracy Dolan, EMS Chief Dan Batsie, and Karen Horn from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. In addition, we have representatives from the Vermont State Police and the Vermont Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch and Director Mike Desrochers with the Division of Fire Safety 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.
-

II. **COVID-19 Overview/Department of Health (VDH) Comments:** Deputy Commissioner Dolan

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont:
 - The percentage of COVID-19 tests in Vermont that come back positive continues to be really low. This is despite an outbreak in Winooski which is impacting the state's statistics. VDH's outbreak team is on top of the Winooski outbreak, working with local partners to reach out to the community and provide information. VDH performed additional testing in Winooski as well.
 - Any outbreak is concerning, but from a public health perspective, outbreaks are expected. We don't think this is pushing Vermont into a different phase of readiness. Outbreaks will happen from time to time, and are not currently impacting plans to reopen the economy.
- Testing/tracing updates
 - Testing for symptomatic individuals is still based on health care provider referrals. In addition, there are ongoing pop-up testing sites, for asymptomatic individuals without a referral:
 - 6/4: Barre, Burlington, St. Albans, and Hartford
 - 6/5: Middlebury and St. Johnsbury
 - 6/6: Burlington
 - 6/8: Burlington and Orleans
 - 6/9: Winooski and Springfield
 - 6/10: Hyde Park, Rutland, and Brattleboro
 - 6/11: Barre, St. Albans, and White River Junction
 - 6/12: Middlebury and St. Albans
 - There is also daily testing in Winooski this week.
 - The infection rate among the tested asymptomatic public is incredibly low.

6/4/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Outline and Talking Points

- For more information on pop-up testing, and to sign up, visit <https://humanresources.vermont.gov/popups>
- We received several questions about travel quarantines.
 - Concerning the length of quarantine, quarantines should last for 14 days. There's been some confusion based on circumstances/risk factor, but a [Health Update](#) released yesterday clarified the length.
 - If a person in quarantine has been symptom-free for the first seven days, they can register for a COVID-19 test. If the test comes back negative, they can end quarantine early.
 - Concerning essential workers quarantining after a trip out of state, [Addendum 7](#) of the executive order says those entering the state for an "essential purpose" do not have to quarantine.
 - An essential purpose is defined as "travel required for personal safety; food, beverage or medicine; medical care; care of others; and to perform work, services or functions deemed critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security."
 - [Addendum 17](#) allows travel without quarantine restrictions, starting Monday, June 8th, to and from the counties of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York with 400 or fewer active cases of COVID-19 per million, as determined and publicized by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD).
- Concerns around COVID-19 spreading at protests:
 - The government of Vermont supports the right to protest. There is a justified wave of concern around social justice and institutionalized racism. We respect the right to protest and think it is important.
 - We are also really concerned about the spread of COVID-19. Walk into protests with eyes wide open. Wear masks, as was largely done at a recent Burlington protest. Physically distance as much as you can.
 - Protests are not the only events where COVID-19 can spread. With Vermonters gathering more, increases in cases of COVID-19 should not necessarily be tied to protests.
- With the healthcare sector reopening for non-emergent procedures, VDH encourages hospitals to test their workers and patients.
- VDH is working on guidance for students' return to primary and secondary schools in the fall. VDH is also talking to Vermont's colleges and universities, trying to answer their questions as best we can. VDH provides testing to students entering Burlington now. VDH may test students coming into Vermont in the fall too. This is uncertain, because the testing focus may change from mass testing to honing in on vulnerable populations. Currently, Vermont is both conducting mass testing and honed testing.

Emergency Medical Services Update - EMS Chief Dan Batsie

- As has been discussed in the past two calls, the Office of EMS changed its [PPE guidance](#). The State adopted CDC interim guidance, which says eye protection, a surgical mask, and gloves are sufficient PPE for most EMS calls. When responding to calls where COVID-19 is confirmed or suspected, providers should additionally wear gowns and N95 masks ("full PPE").
 - The Office of EMS told agencies that respond into Winooski to use "full PPE" on all EMS calls in Winooski. This is very geographically limited guidance, and does not apply to the whole state, nor even all of EMS District 3.
- There are updated EMS and fire non-emergency activity [guidelines](#), to reflect the increased number of people allowed to gather.
- EMS Education:
 - VDH decided to cancel the upcoming EMS conference, because there are too many logistical unknowns. Lodging and social distancing would have been difficult.

6/4/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Outline and Talking Points

- We understand that many providers rely on the EMS conference for continuing education, so to help address this shortfall there will be twice-monthly virtual trainings starting in late summer. These trainings will feature instructors and faculty who would have been at the conference and will be posted to CentreLearn.
 - Once COVID-19 restrictions allow for in-person classes, the Office of EMS will host 1-day sessions around the state.
-

III. SEOC Overview/ VEM Comments: Deputy Commissioner Chris Herrick

- **SEOC status**

- The SEOC is now partially activated, as opposed to fully activated, every day from 0800 until 1600. This means that certain partner agencies are no longer participating in SEOC operations, but can be recalled at any point should the need arise. The SEOC is entirely virtual.

- Now I will go over recent policy updates. On Tuesday, Governor Scott issued a [new executive order](#), creating a Racial Equity Task Force. The Task Force is charged with undertaking three projects:
 1. Evaluate structures of support for racially diverse populations, particularly in light of the disparities in health outcomes highlighted by COVID-19.
 2. Review and consider changes to current state and federal law on hate speech and freedom of speech.
 3. Study and present options for encouraging Vermonters from diverse, marginalized, or underrepresented racial and ethnic groups to run and serve in public office at all levels.
- Last Friday, Governor Scott introduced [addendum 16](#) to the executive order, allowing for limited resumption of close-contact businesses. The addendum also allows for social gatherings of up to 25 people in any confined indoor or outdoor space, but does not change the occupancy limits previously established for businesses, non-profits, and government entities.
- Also on Friday, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development [updated](#) reopening guidance for several sectors. The latest guidance is on the ACCD website under [Resources for Businesses](#). For further questions, use the [“request additional guidance”](#) web inquiry form on the ACCD website or call 802-461-5143.
- Governor Scott said tomorrow’s 11am press conference will likely include updates on indoor dining and travel quarantines from neighboring states.
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - The State has free hand sanitizer available to emergency service organizations. There is a limited supply, therefore each organization is limited to one gallon. [More information and a registration form](#) are on the VDH website.
 - The Vermont Foodbank and Vermont National Guard is distributing food to those in need at distribution points to ease demand on food shelves around the state.

- The next meal distributions:

Date	Town	Location
Thursday, 6/4	Barre	Edward F Knapp State Airport
Friday, 6/5	Bennington	William H Morse State Airport

6/4/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Outline and Talking Points

Monday, 6/8	Newbury Area	Specific location provided with pre-registration
Tuesday, 6/9	Chittenden County	
Wednesday, 6/10	Middlebury Area	
Thursday, 6/11	Brattleboro Area	
Friday, 6/12	Morristown Area	

- Starting June 8th, these distributions will only consist of Farmers-to-Families perishable meals, and will no longer be accompanied by FEMA boxed non-perishable meals.
- We are developing a process for the public to register for these sites. This pre-registration will ensure that everyone who arrives will receive food, and will hopefully reduce wait times.
- Further information, including a complete listing of dates and times, will be updated on VEM's website: <https://vem.vermont.gov/pods>

- **Disaster Declaration - DR 4532**

- Information on how to apply and eligible costs can be found on the VEM website at: vem.vermont.gov/covid19/disaster.
- We received a question about why the state established travel restrictions if they are not being enforced.
 - While folks may not see enforcement, there's a lot of work behind the scenes, especially with lodging and campgrounds, to ensure compliance.
 - As a reminder, out-of-state residents are allowed to commute into Vermont and take day trips, just not stay over.
- We received a question on whether a town could have a "graduation motorcade" with more than 25 participants, as long as no one exits their vehicle.
 - From an epidemiological perspective, such processions are fine.
- 74% of Vermont municipalities have submitted revised Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs). Municipalities that have not yet submitted LEMPs will not be eligible for grants from Vermont Emergency Management or increased funding from the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF) until it is submitted. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact your Regional Planning Commission.

IV. Vermont League of Cities and Towns – Karen Horn

- [Bill H.951](#), that provides state funding for the interest on municipal borrowing for education, passed both the Vermont House and Senate and is on the way to the governor's desk.
- Also, the Vermont Senate today passed [Bill S.349](#) that provides assistance from the CARES Act to municipalities for expenses related to COVID-19. The assistance will be in the form of grants from the Agency of Administration. The bill is being sent to the House.
- VLCT sent out a comprehensive survey on how COVID-19 impacted municipal operations and received responses from 172 towns. The collected information will be passed along to Vermont's congressional delegation and state legislators.
- We received multiple questions on when in-person public meetings should resume, and what that will look like (e.g., selectboards, commissions, committees).

6/4/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Outline and Talking Points

- When in-person meetings should resume is based on guidance from the Governor's Office and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. There is not a specific date at this time. Municipalities will need to make decisions based on their circumstances.
- We received several questions about reopening and working in town offices.
 - The expanding limit on the size of social gatherings generally does not apply to business or government operations. Those who can work from home should continue to do so.
 - Essential workers who must work in an office that is otherwise closed can do so, as long as they follow the guidelines laid out by ACCD and VDH.
 - There is not ACCD guidance specific to municipalities because other, more general guidance applies. Municipalities should adhere to the guidance for comparable operations in the private sector. Check the [ACCD website](#) for the latest guidance.
 - Relevant ACCD guidance includes limiting in-person meetings, limiting shared spaces, limiting travel, wearing cloth face coverings, washing hands, social distancing, etc.

V. Update on Federal Assistance to Municipalities – Congressman Peter Welch

- Congressman Welch expressed gratitude to the local officials and first responders on the call, for doing the hard work to help Vermonters through the pandemic.
- Federal legislative updates:
 - The previously passed CARES Act provided Vermont with over \$1 billion for expenses related to COVID-19. The governor and state legislature have latitude on how to allocate this money.
 - A second piece of legislation, which passed the House but is waiting to be taken up in the Senate, contains significant support for state and local government.
 - There is ongoing work to fix the payroll protection program. We made it more flexible by extending the deadline until the end of the year.

VI. QUESTIONS FROM CALL PARTICIPANTS

- Congressman Welch discussed how there should be more funding for increased internet access, especially in light of COVID-19. He said he is working on bipartisan legislation for rural broadband expansion.
- Town officials, especially Emergency Management Directors, should be considering using VT Alert to communicate with the residents in their municipality. VT Alert can send messages via cell phones, landlines, pagers, and fax machines.
- Pre-registration for food distribution sites will not collect personal information, rather the purpose is to give people a window of time in which to arrive, to cut wait times and let the State predict volume.