

# 11/5/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Outline and Talking Points

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

- Welcome participants on the call.
- This is the call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials. For the past few months, this call has been every other week, but will now return to a weekly schedule.
- The next call will be on Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup> at 2PM. The invitation will go out on Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup>.
- 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 DPS Commissioner Mike Schirling, DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie and Vermont League of Cities and Towns Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn. In addition, we have Capt. Mike Manley from the Vermont State Police and Chief Peter Lynch from the Vermont Fire Academy 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.
- Remind participants they are on mute and will remain on mute until questions at end of the call. If you have an issue unmuting through the app, please use the chat window to ask your question.

### AGENDA:

- I. Intro/call format
- II. Response into Winter
- III. COVID-19/VDH Overview
- IV. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments
- V. VLCT Comments
- VI. Q&A with participants

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## II. Vermont's COVID-19 Response Posture into the Winter: Schirling

- Update on the direction of Vermont for COVID heading into the winter.
  - Vermont's COVID outlook is evolving fairly rapidly; as anticipated COVID fatigue has set in nationally, regionally, and to some extent in VT. We're seeing wider spread of the virus, including a number of small outbreaks and clusters emblematic of how pervasive and aggressive the virus can be – one small event can lead to a number of infections, which then cause additional infections, and so on.
  - We're ensuring that we're tracking sick usage within the Vermont State Police to see when we might need to employ mitigation strategies like we were in March, so that we do not impact crucial staff like PSAPs and the field force.
  - We urge everyone to use caution and use all communication channels to reinforce the State's guidance: don't travel if you don't have to, stay 6' apart, wear a facial covering, wash your hands often, and isolate if you are ill.
- UVM Cyber Attack
  - The Health Network is making good progress on mitigation efforts to stand systems back up.
  - There is not yet a timeline for full restoration.
  - This is a good time to reinforce that cyber security is incredibly important. These ransomware attacks are coming to all of us through emails that look real, so it's important to remember to be very cautious with what you're looking at, opening, and clicking.
- Election Security

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- Things have gone quite well in VT, and nationally save for a few places. We continue to maintain a view on what's happening in VT and nationally, on the live and cyber fronts.
  - We will communicate any information to you if it emerges.
  
  - Update on testing expansion initiatives - DC Herrick
    - We are seeing a bit of an increase in COVID positive cases. As a result, there is a desire to have more frequent testing with a broader surveillance methodology. If we test more people, maybe we can discover outbreaks earlier in their inception.
    - One of the things on the table is trying to develop a system where we'll have testing available seven days a week. The plans are still being formulated logistically.
    - We're looking at the potential of utilizing surveillance testing for first responders, as they are interacting with the community on a daily basis. If we can determine a methodology with Epi that allows us to test first responders on a regular basis, we may be able to determine when and where outbreaks are forming. There will be discussions with all relevant parties before anything is implemented.
    - The cyber-attack at UVM took down their lab, which was processing a number of COVID tests; we've been working on altering the way test results are managed and no capability has been lost, which is pretty impressive. Moving forward, we will continue to pursue an increased volume and pace of testing.
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### III. COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments: HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont:
  - 2,303 is the current case count, a 30-case increase in count from yesterday. We haven't had that level since early in the outbreak, but it's still very low compared to similar states in other parts of the country. The uptick reflects community transition and other outbreaks that we've had. 6 confirmed cases in hospitals and 4 in ICU, with none ventilated.
- Update on outbreaks and clusters
  - The sports-related outbreak in central VT is the largest outbreak so far. This is important because it wasn't related to playing sports, but to failure to follow guidance and procedures.
  - COVID fatigue has led to some large events, with outbreaks in schools and workplaces, including over 60 cases at St. Mike's college. A short lack in vigilance can really have ripple effects and consequences.
  - There are 6 outbreaks right now, including two schools with less than 5 positive patients each, and 3 worksite outbreaks with mostly 1-2 cases. There are 16 situations in schools and childcare, mostly with 1 positive person. There are also six colleges, 13 healthcare facilities, six worksites, and 7 miscellaneous (including a couple of gatherings that have led to significant numbers of positive patients). The circumstances are not going to allow for normal holiday gatherings, so please be vigilant.
- Testing/tracing updates
  - We're working to expand testing and make it available as a surveillance tool. There is still a lot of work to do on that front but some big changes are coming down the line.
- Vaccination planning updates

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- We've submitted our draft plan to the CDC and they've asked us to be ready for vaccines as of 11/15, but we're not anticipating that we'll receive them then. The goal is to have the systems and mechanisms in place so we can receive them as soon as they're ready.
  - The CDC asked us to look at the populations that need the vaccines first and prioritize them. First responders will be at the front of the line when we are ready to start administering the vaccine. Other populations that are high priority are healthcare workers, long-term care facility residents, and other locations with the highest risk. The other elements of the plan are still in development but what we know is that when anyone looks to the future of administering a vaccine, we see EMS providers – whether that's administering among themselves, or in working with VDH in a public health capacity and helping with PODs and administration to the general public.
  - First responders are in phase 1A of vaccine distribution in the [Vermont Draft Interim COVID-19 Vaccination Plan](#).
  - EMS updates
    - We're trying to fill out the EMS team at VDH, including filling the EMS Chief and Training Administrators. We've finished with the interviews for Chief and working with a very good candidate that we hope to get in place. We've just started interviewing for Training Administrators with seven qualified individuals, so hopefully we'll have a good candidate there as well soon.
    - We've been working with the Legislature on funding. Of nearly \$2m we received, we've spent almost all of it funding EMS education in about two months. In an ordinary year, we train about 200 people – over the course of August through now, we've placed a little over 300 people in EMS classes. This shows that cost is a barrier, and when we remove that barrier, people flock to those classes.
    - We also have two rounds of grants coming your way, the first being an EMS stabilization grant. These grants will help make up for lost revenue during this crisis and we've identified 50 agencies that we will be working with.
    - The second element is still a work in progress, but we're referring to it as a worker stabilization grant. This will help get relief to the first responders and EMS providers who attended calls during the COVID-19 pandemic. We're working to identify how many people are participating in the response, then work with agencies themselves to provide them grants and allow them to allocate them out to their active staff rosters. There will be more information to come soon.
    - We had a good presentation from Scott Moore with the American Ambulance Association. We have a link to the presentation on [our website](#), and downloadable copies of all documents that were used.
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### IV. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- **SEOC status:** The SEOC remains activated every weekday from 0800 until 1600. On the 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.
- **Recent policy updates:**
  - Applications for a second round of the [Frontline Employee Hazard Pay Grant Program](#) are now open. This round expands the types of employers who are now eligible to apply (for instance, pharmacies, grocery stores and certain retail stores are now covered) and includes employees who worked for an eligible employer last spring during the worst of the pandemic in Vermont but are no longer working for that employer. The program is first come, first served.
  - There are three recent updates to recreation guidelines:

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- First, on October 26<sup>th</sup>, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development announced [updated policies](#) to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in Vermont-based youth and adult recreational sports. Sports leagues are now restricted to in-state activities only, with strict limits on the number of spectators permitted in attendance at indoor sports events.
  - Second, on Tuesday, the Agency of Education and the Department of Health released [winter school sports guidance](#), prohibiting wrestling, indoor track, and spectators at indoor events. Practices can start on November 30<sup>th</sup>, and competitions can begin on January 11<sup>th</sup>. This guidance is subject to change and further delay, depending on the evolving epidemiological situation.
  - Third, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development announced new [guidance for ski areas](#) on Tuesday, outlining requirements above and beyond standard COVID-19 precautions. The restrictions include maintaining contact tracing information for all visitors and limiting occupancy in day lodges and ski lifts.
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
    - The Farmers-to-Families food box program, run by the Vermont Foodbank, has received an extension from the USDA and will continue distribution in November and December. Plans are still being finalized, but the Foodbank anticipates starting the distributions back up on November 16<sup>th</sup>, with the first two weeks of reservations available online at [www.dhr.vermont.gov/food-help](http://www.dhr.vermont.gov/food-help) on Monday the 9<sup>th</sup>.
    - The SEOC continues to support vaccine planning and is working on planning efforts for receipt and distribution of a vaccine.
    - The SEOC and the Fire Academy will be sending out a survey to the entire fire service to gather information on membership from all Departments. This is a preparatory action that goes along with vaccine planning because first responders are in phase 1A for vaccine distribution. We are not sure if we will need this information, that depends on the enrollment of providers for vaccine distribution, but we want to make sure we capture membership information so we can be ready for vaccine distribution if needed.
      - The VSP is also working to gather this information from Law Enforcement agencies, and Dan Batsie is working to gather this information for EMS agencies.

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### V. Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Karen Horn

- The Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program (VCAAP) has been expanded to include overdue drinking water and wastewater bills at municipal systems. Now, customers of all water and sewer utilities are eligible to receive grants for overdue bills caused by economic hardship due to income loss from COVID-19.
  - Water and wastewater systems that want to participate in the assistance program must register with the Department of Public Service by tomorrow, Nov. 6 at 5:00 pm. Starting next week, residential and business customers of registered systems will be able to apply for a grant to cover unpaid bills that are more than 60 days overdue and incurred after March 1, 2020. The funding will be paid directly to the utility to cover the eligible portion of a customer's overdue bill.
  - Please contact the Department of Public Service's Consumer Affairs and Public Information (CAPI) Division at 1-800-622-4496, via email at [psd.consumer@vermont.gov](mailto:psd.consumer@vermont.gov), with any and all questions about VCAAP. Members of the Rural Water Association can contact VRWA at [info@vtruralwater.org](mailto:info@vtruralwater.org) or 802-660-4988."
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### VI. Questions from Call Participants

- Deputy Commissioner Herrick said that no vaccine will be distributed that hasn't gone through the rigorous safety testing that all vaccines must go through. The same standards will be applied to whatever vaccines may come out, no matter which channel they come from. Vaccine approval is a three-phase process, which includes peer review and human trials. Those trials have moved quickly, but they still contain all the same rigor we would use for any vaccine to analyze safety.
- Can you provide insight of eligibility of municipal fire departments to participate in hazard pay grant?
  - DEPRIP Director Batsie said the administrators of the grant has told us that being an agent of the state precludes them from participating in the grant. The workforce stabilization grant will be something they're eligible for, as a way to acknowledge the gap there. We're not the administrators of the hazard pay grant, so you may want to follow up with them individually.
- Will municipal/public works employees be part of the vaccine priority group?
  - VEM Director Bornemann said there is a category in Phase 1 or Phase 2 of the Vermont Interim Draft COVID-19 Vaccination Plan which includes the prioritization of critical infrastructure personnel, which public works employees are included under.
- Can we prioritize testing of first responders?
  - DPS Deputy Commissioner Herrick noted he would carry that forward as a solid suggestion.