

1/7/21 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, January 14th at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, January 11th.
- 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, Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch, and Vermont League of Cities and Towns Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn. Staffers from Vermont's congressional delegation on are the call to answer questions about the new federal coronavirus relief act. In addition, we have Vermont State Police Captain Mike Manley and Division of Fire Safety Director Michael Desrochers 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. VLCT comments
- V. DFS comments
- VI. Q&A with participants

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- Before we start, I want to acknowledge the events of yesterday. I'm quite proud to be serving Vermonters and I'm also quite proud to know how each and every one of you work toward the same goal as us – safety and security of Vermonters and Americans. Governor Scott was just sworn into his third term, and I look forward to working with you all for another couple of years.
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II. COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments: HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont
 - COVID-19 infections continue to increase in Vermont. Yesterday saw the second-highest single-day case count. An increase in testing is partly responsible for this record, but so is a significant increase in COVID-19 in our communities.
 - The 7-day average positivity rate is 2.7%. There were 1,127 cases of COVID-19 reported in the past week, which is almost double the number reported the previous week.
 - There have been 21 deaths associated with COVID-19 in the past week, and 74 in the last 30 days. The death rate is the highest it's ever been, both locally and nationally.
 - The number of hospitalizations remains steady. There are 32 COVID-19 patients currently hospitalized in Vermont, down from 38 yesterday. 6 patients are in the ICU, and 1 is on a ventilator.
 - We received a question on whether the Department of Health could preemptively let local officials know whether local surges in COVID-19 cases are due to specific outbreaks or general community spread, for instance the recent increase in Addison county.
 - The recent jump in infections in Addison county is not the result of a particular outbreak, nor is the similar situation in Bennington county.

1/7/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

- If there's a community outbreak of concern, the Department of Health will reach out to local officials. Yet there's frequently not a lot of reason to alert local government even if there is an outbreak, because guidance won't change. There's widespread community transmission of COVID-19 already, so everyone should already assume COVID-19 is all around them and behave accordingly.
- Testing/tracing updates
 - COVID-19 testing is ongoing. There are about 19 fixed locations a day statewide, open to all Vermonters.
 - The Department of Health is finalizing the details of first responder surveillance testing. 11 testing sites will set aside a half hour a week for first responders. In Chittenden county, a testing site will offer a full day once a month for just first responders, due to higher demand there.
 - There will be a walk-in form to be filled out ahead of time.
 - Details on this initiative will be posted very, very soon.
 - The Department of Health still has capacity for rapid response to fire/EMS/police agencies with threatened operations following COVID-19 exposure. To access testing and other epidemiological support, reach out to the watch officer at any time, who will coordinate with the Health Operations Center.
- Vaccination updates
 - Vermont is in the first phase of COVID-19 vaccinations. Just under 18,000 Vermonters have been vaccinated so far, or about 3% of the population.
 - We've heard and shared concerns of first responders regarding their vaccine prioritization status, and I'm happy to say there is now an updated definition of first responders eligible for priority vaccination:
 - "Emergency medical service personnel and responders include staff within ambulance or rescue squads, fire or police departments, who respond to emergency calls to provide or assist with care or transport for; or access to sick or injured persons."
 - This definition is aimed at those with patient-facing jobs, and doesn't include auxiliary or support personnel. We care about them too, but there are only so many vaccines.
 - First response agencies that have not submitted a roster or need to update it based on the eligibility requirements please reach out to Rich Cogliano at Vermont Emergency Management: Richard.cogliano@vermont.gov or 800-347-0488 and ask for him. There is no need to resubmit your roster if there are no updates.
 - The State will send these rosters to hospitals, which are responsible for vaccinating area first responders. Hospitals will arrange clinics and reach out to first response agencies. If your agency hasn't heard from a hospital about vaccinations by the end of next week, reach out to me or someone at Vermont Emergency Management.
 - We anticipate that all eligible first responders should be able to get their first COVID-19 vaccine dose within 3 weeks.
 - After priority vaccinations are given to first responders, healthcare workers, and long-term care facility residents, Vermont will move to the next phase, using age bands in 5-year increments. This is because age correlates closely with risk of death from COVID-19. The State is still discussing how underlying conditions will impact prioritization.
 - This will be a significant lift. There are hundreds of thousands of Vermonters to vaccinate. The State is working to build the needed infrastructure, and EMS will be an important part of that. There are 2,000 EMS providers in Vermont, and we hope to really draw from that pool.
 - The State already has contracts with 28 EMS agencies to provide staffing for vaccination clinics. The State will pay agencies and providers for their time, including travel and a fee for scheduling.

1/7/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

- Paramedics and Advanced EMTs are already authorized to administer vaccinations, per a recent protocol change.
 - The Vermont Office of EMS is also expanding the vaccination protocol to EMTs, though they will need to also complete a training program including a psychomotor check off. The process is different than injecting epinephrine and the supply is more constrained, so this quick check is important.
 - EMS agencies credentialed at the BLS level that did not contract with the state earlier can join in now.
 - Those with known current COVID-19 infection should defer vaccination until they recover from acute illness (if the person had symptoms) and criteria have been met to discontinue isolation.
 - EMS updates
 - The Vermont Office of EMS received questions on what EMS providers who exhibit vaccination side effects mirroring COVID-19 should do. Specific guidance on this subject is still being crafted, but generally speaking anyone with suspicious symptoms should contact their primary care provider. The normal symptomology of vaccination side effects (sore arm and achy joints, most commonly) can be differentiated from COVID-19 symptoms.
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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.
 - The SEOC will issue COVID-19 vaccine coordination instructions for first responders directly to agency heads as soon as that information is available.
 - **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - The newly enacted coronavirus relief act includes \$1.5 billion nationally for an additional round of the Farmers-to-Families Food Box Program through April.
 - Contract awards are expected by January 19th, with deliveries starting shortly thereafter.
 - Details are still being worked out, but the Vermont Foodbank and its partners are preparing to use this additional funding to continue the program in a similar manner to previous rounds of distribution.
 - We know that the need remains great, and we will work to meet that need.
 - Emergency service organizations with service interruptions due to COVID-19 should reach out to the SEOC. Our Safety and Security Branch is focused on helping with exactly these sorts of requests. The SEOC can be reached 24/7 at: 800-347-0488.
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IV. Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn

- The new Vermont legislative session started yesterday.
- On Tuesday, the outgoing state legislature's Joint Fiscal Committee allocated up to \$2 million in funding for mail-in voting for Town Meeting Day, as requested by the Scott administration. The funding also covers mail-in ballots for school districts, waste management districts, etc.

1/7/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

- Legislation actually allowing mail-in voting for Town Meeting Day as well as moving Town Meeting Day to a different date ([H.48](#)) is expected in the coming days. This legislation will also let Vermont's secretary of state make last-minute adjustments if the epidemiological situation so warrants.
 - The Vermont League of Cities and Towns posts a [legislation update](#) to its website every Friday.
 - On alternating Mondays starting this Monday at 11am, The Vermont League of Cities and Towns will host [virtual meetings with its advocacy staff](#).
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V. Division of Fire Safety: Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch

- The Division's fire service capabilities survey measures the impact of COVID-19 on the capacity of Vermont's fire service. The latest survey is mostly good news, with only 14% of counties reporting challenges with responder availability due to COVID-19.
 - Two departments in Windsor county reported COVID-positive responders. One department had to quarantine 7 staff, the other 6. No outside assistance was needed, and the departments are working on getting back to full operation.
 - Every county is operating normally or with minor adjustments.
 - No one said they needed additional resources to respond to calls, and there isn't an anticipated need in the near future.
 - 50% of counties reported responders being exposed to COVID-19. These were small situations, not part of outbreaks.
 - The latest round of FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program opened on January 4th and will close on February 12th.
 - FEMA is offering virtual 2-hour workshops covering who can apply and how to apply:
 - January 12, 2021 at 10:00 AM: <https://fema.zoomgov.com/j/1615924801>; Dial-in: 1-646-828-7666; PIN: 1615924801#; Passcode: 987725
 - January 13, 2021 at 7:00 PM: <https://fema.zoomgov.com/j/1608551484>; Dial-in: 1-646-828-7666; PIN: 1608551484#; Passcode: 327086
 - January 14, 2021 at 2:00 PM: <https://fema.zoomgov.com/j/1604780550>; Dial-in: 1-646-828-7666; PIN: 1604780550#; Passcode: 013851
 - More information is on the [Vermont Fire Academy website](#). Feel free to call with questions.
 - Thank you to Haley Pero from Senator Sanders' office, and all of Vermont's congressional delegation, for advocating for this program and supporting first responders
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VI. Questions from Call Participants

- The up-to \$2 million for mail-in ballots is already fully authorized, using the extended timeline to spend Coronavirus Relief Funds.
- First response agency employees who don't have direct contact with patients are not eligible for priority vaccinations. The Vermont Vaccine Implementation Advisory Committee has specified that "health care personnel" includes:
 - Long-term care staff who have direct patient contact, including all health care providers who enter the facility, regardless of who employs them, as well as ancillary staff. Family caregivers are not included in this definition.

1/7/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

- Health care providers (all classes including students and support personnel), primarily but not exclusively located in the Emergency Departments and Intensive Care Units, providing care to patients with COVID-19.
- Emergency Medical Services personnel with direct patient contact, including staff within ambulance or rescue squads, fire or police departments, who respond to emergency calls to provide or assist with care or transport for, or access to, sick or injured persons.
- Home health care clinical staff and caregivers who have contact with multiple patients or who are high-risk for serious illness from COVID-19.
- Any other health care providers and staff who have patient contact.
- The above definition of healthcare personnel includes fire departments that don't directly offer EMS, because they still interact with patients during rescue operations.
- The State is working with ski resorts to make sure they provide COVID-19 guidance to their guests. State policies aren't adhered to 100% of the time, but we know that ski resorts are doing a good job to manage physical distancing and other measures. The best thing is to educate those not in compliance. Out-of-state visitors may apply their state's travel guidance to Vermont, so we need to educate them on what Vermont's expectations are. This is not a perfect solution. The Agency of Commerce and Community Development is working hard to provide the best guidance it can.