

4/08/20 First Responder Call Outline

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

- The purpose of this call is to try and address the themes of questions we received through the survey; we may not be able to answer some very specific questions.

II. **DPS Commissioner's Comments:** Commissioner Schirling

- The overall situation in Vermont is holding steady.
- There have been questions and requests regard PPE. The SEOC is working with VDH and the Strategic National Stockpile warehouse to update PPE guidance, to be released today or tomorrow. My comments today are a preview of what that guidance will likely advise.
- The state's PPE guidance, as well as the prioritization of PPE requests, is data-driven, based off work by VDH's epidemiological branch.
- Non-medical masks are recommended for all public contact, on and off duty. Limit contact with the public when feasible, such as by limiting crew sizes and having only one provider interact directly with a patient.
- The state will mostly be delivering KN95s to emergency response agencies, reserving N95s for those in direct close contact with likely COVID-19 cases for an extended time, such as hospital staff. However, N95s should be used by emergency responders during aerosoling procedures.
- **EMS:** As detailed in the updated request process, EMS agencies should calculate their PPE burn rate with their 30-day call volume (either the past 30 days or an average 30 days over the past year) and the assumption that only 2 responders should be on most medical calls.
- **Law enforcement:** Law enforcement officers should limit public contact to the greatest extent possible, and should use non-medical masks during normal contacts with asymptomatic individuals. Law enforcement agencies should take complaints via the phone or at a distance when possible.
- **Fire:** Non-EMS fire departments should avoid direct contact with public when feasible. If firefighters must be close to the public, such as during a vehicle extrication, wearing a mask would be warranted. A surgical mask should generally be fine in such a scenario.
- Agencies with their own PPE supply chain should not ask for supplies from the state. To request PPE from the state stockpile, continue to use [this form](#). Deliveries are being made daily. Agencies with emergency requests should call the SEOC.
- There will also be forthcoming guidance about reusing masks, such as using the same mask for an entire shift.
- There decontamination units for disinfecting masks inbound to the state, purchased through the University of Vermont Medical Center. There will be upcoming guidance on keeping used masks for decontamination.

III. **SEOC Overview and Updates:** Director Erica Bornemann

- The SEOC is fully activated from 0800 until 1600 every day, and is engaged in coordinating the state's COVID-19 response. The SEOC is now almost fully virtual, with only call takers stationed in public safety headquarters.
- Governor's Orders
 - On Friday, Governor Scott issued [Addendum 8](#) to his Executive Order, requiring local governments, state agencies, and private non-profit organizations to arrange for non-congregate housing for clients, vulnerable populations, first responders, and healthcare workers.
 - Non-congregate housing solutions shall be arranged to provide adequate social distancing as needed.

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- A temporary quarantine and isolation program shall be implemented to provide adequate social distancing for those reasonably believed to have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19, or recovering from COVID-19.
- If needed, non-congregate temporary housing shall be provided for first responders and health care workers who are at reasonable risk of having been exposed to or are infected with COVID-19, or are recovering from COVID-19, and cannot return to their usual residence.
- The SEOC is still working on the specifics of implementing this policy, such as the location of the temporary housing, exactly who is eligible, and how housing can be requested.
- This addendum is less of a directive and more of an empowerment measure. Issuing the addendum was necessary for non-congregate sheltering costs to be reimbursable through FEMA. Agencies that want or need to house first responders away from their families may do so, and those costs will be eligible for reimbursement.
- Active SEOC Missions
 - There is continued regional coordination of limited resources, especially within FEMA Region 1 (i.e., New England).
 - The SEOC is working on avenues of funding for COVID-19 expenses. Today, President Trump approved a major disaster declaration for Vermont, which is different than the preexisting emergency declaration. The SEOC will provide information to eligible applicants for reimbursement for protective measure costs. **The most important thing for you all to do now is track expenses.**
 - The SEOC created a medical logistics branch, coordinating the efforts of the state stockpile and medical commodity workers. The branch will be working on procuring hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies to add to the state stockpile.
 - The SEOC is working on a plan to extend the capacity of morgues and funeral homes, such as by placing and staffing temporary mortuaries at hospitals.
 - Medical Surge capacity update:
 - There are medical surge sites, to assist with patient overflow from hospitals, at the following locations:
 - Collins Perley Sports and Fitness Center in St. Albans
 - Barre Civic Center in Barre
 - University of Vermont in Burlington
 - Essex Junction at the Champlain Valley Exposition
 - Spartan Arena in Rutland County
 - These surge sites are mostly for low-acuity, non-COVID-19 patients.
 - These sites will be operated in close coordination with health care providers and will only be used if hospitals exceed their capacity. None of the sites are currently housing patients.
 - The SEOC is standing up a transportation group to address coordination of resources, and movement to and between alternative care sites.
 - Isolation and recovery housing:
 - The SEOC and the Agency of Human Services are establishing regional isolation and recovery sites with wrap-around services for individuals facing homelessness, with mental health challenges, with disabilities, or who otherwise need more support or are in the custody of the state.
 - The Harbor House site in Burlington is operational.

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- The SEOC and the Agency of Human Services are working on additional sites in White River Junction and Plainfield.
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IV. COVID-19 Overview and VDH/EMS Comments: EMS Chief Dan Batsie

- The Department of Health (VDH) is getting regular guidance from the CDC that up to 25% of COVID-19 transmission is from asymptomatic carriers. This information is changing VDH guidance, such as recommending increased use of PPE and presuming everyone is infected.
 - VDH tweaked the cardiac arrest protocol, directing providers to contact medical control before transport, to discuss whether the patient requires transport and to give time for the receiving hospital to prepare. This change does not alter the care provided.
 - VDH continues to evaluate cleaning/disinfection procedures in the EMS setting. Normal cleaning (e.g., with bleach) is probably the best approach, as VDH has yet to find a more specialized disinfection product worth acquiring.
 - **PPE:**
 - Although giving a mask to every EMS patient is a good idea in theory, VDH advises against giving asymptomatic patients masks due to the limited supply. Commissioner Schirling added that the state ordered a large number of flat masks, arriving in one or two weeks, which may be appropriate for asymptomatic patients.
 - Two ways to decontaminate used PPE are being pursued:
 - The University of Vermont Medical Center will be receiving VPro Decon units within the next week, which can decontaminate N95 masks.
 - As a back-up option, Buildings and General Services (BGS) submitted a request for N-95 decontamination services with Battelle Decon Services.
 - In-person EMS training has been cancelled for the duration of the COVID-19 response, though VDH is looking into online didactic programs to start EMS classes, with the hands-on training delayed until after social distancing measures are lifted. More information on this topic is forthcoming.
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V. VSP Comments: Colonel Matthew Birmingham

- Overall, law enforcement staffing is not an issue, with only one full-time and one part-time law enforcement officer testing positive for COVID-19 so far.
- There are no new protocols, nor new crime trends (overall, call volume is down).
- Some agencies expressed interest in diverting highway safety grant patrol money to the COVID-19 response, and that will be allowable on a case-by-case basis.
- Enforcement of the governor's executive order
 - Reports of noncompliance should be directed to local law enforcement, which should verify the noncompliance and log it in the web form provided by VSP. Significant noncompliance will be forwarded to the attorney general. The enforcement focus is more on fully operational lodging facilities than kids playing basketball, for example.
 - On Friday, the attorney general issued a [directive](#) to law enforcement on how to enforce the governor's executive order. The directive emphasizes education and voluntary compliance, while also allowing the Office of the Attorney General to pursue **civil** enforcement (including injunctions and fines of up to \$1,000 per day of continued noncompliance) and (as a last resort or under extraordinary circumstances) **criminal** enforcement (including a fine up to \$500 and/or imprisonment of up to 6 months).

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- There was a question about whether parks and recreation facilities will be ordered to close. Forest, Parks, and Recreation Commissioner Michael Snyder said his agency is advising against the use of any place of congregation, and is distributing messaging to that effect. However, FPR cannot predict what the governor may order.

VI. DFS Comments: Pete Lynch, Vermont Fire Academy

- This week's fire service survey went out to the 14 county points-of-contact, who then reached out to the fire chiefs in their county. The points-of-contact are spending a tremendous amount of time gathering information.
 - This week, there was a small increase in the number of departments needing automatic aid, however this had a minimal impact on the system overall.
 - Overall, call volume has dropped over the last week, with the exception of communities with large numbers of second homeowners, which are seeing an increase in calls related to that population.
 - Fire service staffing is stable, especially because volunteer firefighters working from home are more available than usual to respond to calls.
 - Fire departments' PPE requests are being largely met. Many chiefs said they're receiving PPE in a timely manner.
- While state assistance is still often required, there's many instances of resource needs being dealt with at a more local level, such as inter-county coordination.

VII. QUESTIONS FROM CALL PARTICIPANTS

- Despite rumors to the contrary, state parks remain open to the public. Some trail systems are closed, but that's due more to muddy conditions than COVID-19. Go to the [Vermont State Parks website](#) for updates. Regardless, everyone should avoid congregation. Local jurisdictions concerned about the lack of social distancing in state parks should publicize [this guidance](#) from the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation.
- The new temporary morgue sites are not yet operational, and will not be opened until there's a demonstrated local need. When opened, these sites will be available for overflow from hospitals, as well as those who've died in long-term care facilities or private residences. Remains at these sites will be managed by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.
- Employees worried about working with someone recovered from COVID-19 can be assured that if the guidelines are followed, they are safe.
- Local health officers looking to issue emergency orders should consult with municipal legal counsel and the governor's legal counsel before taking action. Also, VDH has guidance on this topic.
- There is not currently a way for first responders to be tested for COVID-19 without going to a physician, though rapid, bedside testing may be available later. Also, testing results are occasionally incorrect, so testing should not be the only step taken before a first responder goes back to work. More guidance should be forthcoming.

VIII. Update from Congressman Welch

- The congressman expressed gratitude for the work of first responders.
- Congressman Welch discussed the recent federal stimulus package and its relevance to Vermont's first responders.

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- Congressman Welch mentioned the importance of hazard pay for first responders and other essential workers.
- In responses to questions, Congressman Welch discussed compensation for volunteers, funding sources for third service EMS agencies, and tax relief for first responders.