

2/11/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Outline and Talking Points

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 18th at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Tuesday, February 16th.
- 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, Vermont League of Cities and Towns Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn, and Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity Sarah Phillips. In addition, we have Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch 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. VLCT comments
- V. Housing Group comments
- VI. 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**
 - 122 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Vermont today, which is about average for the last month. There have been 746 cases in the last week, down from 943 cases the week prior.
 - The COVID-19 test positivity rate is 1.8%, which is the same as last week but down from 2.8% a month ago.
 - There have been 32 deaths associated with COVID-19 in Vermont in the last 30 days.
 - 53 people are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, which is more than in the spring or summer. Of those hospitalized, 13 are in intensive care and 0 are on ventilators.
 - More epidemiological data is available on the [Department of Health website](#).
 - The Department of Health's Epidemiological Branch is currently managing 79 outbreaks across schools, businesses, long-term care facilities, etc.
- **Testing/tracing updates**
 - There are 21 COVID-19 testing sites today. The sites continue to offer priority testing for first responders at certain times.
 - The state Watch Officer can be contacted for situations threatening the operations of a first response agency. The Department of Health will help with outbreak response and testing as warranted.
- **Vaccination updates**
 - Phase 1a vaccinations (which include those of first responders) are ongoing. I'm happy to say that we're running out of first responders for clinic stand-by lists, indicating that almost all Vermont first responders who want a vaccine got one.
 - Vermont first response agencies which do not yet have scheduled vaccination appointments should reach out to their local hospital. Relay any trouble coordinating with the hospital to the SEOC or the Department of Health.

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- Vermont is increasing its vaccination capacity daily. As of today, 12% of Vermonters aged 16+ have been vaccinated. More Vermont COVID-19 vaccine statistics are available on the [Department of Health website](#).
 - Vaccination clinics are proliferating. There are new Department of Health clinics and healthcare partner clinics across the state.
 - Vaccination of the homebound started last week, and about 500 individuals received their first dose so far. The Department of Health anticipates getting to everyone under the care of home health agencies in Windsor, Windham, Orange, and Caledonia Counties by the end of the week.
 - There are many homebound individuals not in the care of home health agencies who we also have to reach. We hope to start vaccinating this population next week, working with hospitals and primary care providers. There will likely be a way for individuals to request vaccination at home.
 - The Department of Health is working on how to triage requests for vaccination at home. It's an expensive way to administer vaccines, so the Department wants to focus on those who really need it.
 - The Department of Health is also looking ahead to homebound individuals in the next age band (70+ years old).
 - When EMS agencies called ahead to notify individuals of the chance to be vaccinated at home, many thought it was a scam and even called 911 to report it. The Department of Health can provide a list of agencies actively participating in this effort to anyone, to assure them it's legitimate.
 - **EMS updates**
 - The Vermont Office of EMS is developing a new "first responder" certification level, which will require less training than current certification levels. This certification is aimed at drivers and other currently non-licensed personnel.
 - The Office is also working on updating instructor levels, and rethinking EMS testing (for instance, substituting classroom experience for some of the high-stakes testing).
 - The CDC released new [recommendations on double-masking](#) and other ways to improve the effectiveness of masks. Vermont guidance has not yet changed – any updated policy will be pushed out through the usual channels.
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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.
 - **Policy updates:**
 - School and youth leagues can [resume competitions](#) starting tomorrow.
 - Teams can only schedule 2 games in any 7-day period. Spectators are not allowed, and any referees or officials must be masked.
 - Adult recreational sports remain suspended.
 - **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - The SEOC provides ongoing support and planning for the COVID-19 vaccination effort, including resource support and forecasting for increased allocations.
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IV. Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn

- Congressman Welch's office shared a [brief](#) yesterday about likely federal aid for state and local governments included in President Biden's American Recovery Plan.
 - Close to \$150 million is coming to Vermont cities and towns (excluding Burlington, which is instead eligible for different programs). Guidance on how the money can be spent is forthcoming.
 - The House Oversight Committee will be taking up the state and local funding during its mark-up session tomorrow.
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V. Agency of Human Services Housing Group: Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity Sarah Phillips

- The Agency of Human Services continues to provide non-congregate sheltering through its General Assistance (GA) motel/hotel voucher program. Roughly 1,900 rooms are in use across the state.
 - As COVID-19 mitigation measures are lifted, the Agency of Human Services will transition back toward its pre-pandemic eligibility criteria for the GA program, through a phased approach.
 - Here are the specifics of the transition, as proposed by the Agency to the state legislature:
 - In the first phase, GA eligibility will change for new voucher recipients, but remain unchanged for those currently in the program.
 - In the second phase, the GA program will return to its pre-pandemic eligibility criteria, which is much more restrictive than the current criteria.
 - In the third phase, the Agency of Human Services will end the GA emergency housing program and instead transfer sheltering responsibilities to community-based organizations, which will still provide hotel/motel vouchers as needed.
 - The hope is that the first phase will take place this spring, the second phase in the summer, and the third phase in the fall. However, this timeline is subject to change as the epidemiological situation evolves.
 - The Agency of Human Services is also putting a lot of effort and resources on helping people exit the GA program and move into more permanent housing.
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VI. Questions from Call Participants

- The governor will announce registration for the next COVID-19 vaccination age band at an upcoming press conference.
- This year's flu season is less severe than in years past, both nationally and in Vermont.
- To view a breakdown of COVID-19 deaths in Vermont by date, go to the [COVID-19 data dashboard](#), hit the arrows on the bottom until you get to the "Cases and Deaths" screen, and use the circles on the top of each graph to "zoom in" to the time period you're interested in.
- Vermont does not yet have new guidance for relaxing public health restrictions for vaccinated individuals. There will not be a blanket policy, but rather specific parameters. The Department of Health is looking into changing guidance, and will publicize it when published.