

8/13/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

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

- This is the every-other-week call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials. The next call will be on Thursday, August 27th at 2PM. The invitation will go out on Monday, August 24th.
 - 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 EMS Chief Dan Batsie, Agency of Education Deputy Secretary Heather Bouchey, and Agency of Commerce and Community Development Deputy Secretary Ted Brady. In addition, we have Karen Horn from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Lt. Tara Thomas from the Vermont State Police, Director Michael Desrochers from Division of Fire Safety, and Chief Pete 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.
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II. **COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments:** Health Operations Center Incident Commander and EMS Chief Dan Batsie

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont
 - A total of 1,484 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in Vermont. There has been no more than 1 COVID-19 patient in the ICU at a time since early May. There has been 1 death associated with COVID-19 in Vermont in the last 30 days.
 - There continue to be outbreaks and clusters of COVID-19, as expected. The Department of Health works to identify these situations and intervene swiftly.
 - The large outbreak in Winooski and Burlington formally ended. The network of cases was identified early and aggressively traced, with help from community partners.
 - There are currently 5 open outbreaks/clusters, some of which have not resulted in new cases for weeks. One cluster is at a corrections facility, involving incarcerated individuals transferred from out of state. There is also a small cluster in Rutland with 2 associated cases.
- The Department of Health is working hard on projects related to the reopening of schools. There will inevitably be clusters/outbreaks of COVID-19 at schools, and the Department is working with schools to build a framework for mitigating those situations.
- The Department of Health is increasing its surge capacity, for instance by hiring additional contact tracers and call takers.
- Testing:
 - Testing for symptomatic individuals is still on-demand based on health care provider referrals. In addition, there are ongoing pop-up testing sites, for asymptomatic individuals without a referral.
 - The state's COVID-19 testing initiatives continue, and the Department of Health is working to expand the number of organizations offering testing, to include primary care physicians, Federally Qualified Health Centers, physician offices, and pharmacies.
 - The Department of Health is looking hard at the state's testing strategy. Tests of unexposed and asymptomatic members of the general public have yielded very few cases of infection. Therefore, the Department is working on a different testing strategy, as outlined in the state's [COVID-19 Testing Plan](#).

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The goal is to clarify who should be tested and when, and to make sure finite resources are applied in a way that is meaningful. This plan maintains capacity for local testing; the State will not give up on pop-up testing sites.

- For more information about pop-up testing, and to sign up, visit:
<https://humanresources.vermont.gov/popups>
 - EMS updates
 - The new [EMS tuition voucher](#) system began on Monday. Students enrolling in a Vermont-approved EMS course (EMR, EMT, AEMT, Paramedic) before December 31 who are actively affiliated with a Vermont EMS agency are eligible for a tuition voucher. The goal is to put more EMS providers on the streets of Vermont.
 - Out-of-state programs can be eligible if the Office of EMS establishes a relationship with the program.
 - There's a lot of money in this program that the Office of EMS is looking to spend quickly, so we ask that towns and EMS agencies help the Office promote this program. Applications are being reviewed as they come in.
 - As a reminder, please adhere to the minimum PPE requirement on every call: gloves, mask, and eye protection. If COVID-19 is confirmed or suspected, or if performing aerosolizing procedures, ramp up the level of PPE to include a gown and an N95 mask. Stay safe out there.
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III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: 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 will be in monitoring status this upcoming Monday the 17th as well, in observance of Bennington Battle Day. The SEOC is entirely virtual.
- Now I will go over recent policy updates. Certain public safety, public health, health care and human services employers may apply for [hazard pay grant funds](#) for their employees who worked to help mitigate or respond to COVID-19. \$28 million in CARES Act funding is available on a first-come, first-served basis.
 - On Monday, the Agency of Human Services released an [FAQ about the program](#). The link is on their website and will also be in the notes for this call.
 - For this program a “covered employer” does NOT include the State or a political subdivision of the State, and therefore a town or county may not apply for this opportunity. First response agencies run by municipalities can look to FEMA Public Assistance (PA) and the Local Government Expense Reimbursement (LGER) to capture eligible expenses.
- Applications are open for [operational relief grants](#) to support childcare facilities, summer day camps, afterschool programs, parent child centers, and Children’s Integrated Services fiscal agents impacted by COVID-19. \$12 million in CARES Act funding is available in this competitive grant program. Applications are due August 26th.
- A reminder about Local Government Expense Reimbursement (LGER):
 - Applications for these grants are due on September 4th. A link to the application will be included in these notes.

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- LGER Grant funds will not reimburse expenses that are covered by insurance or other funding sources, including funding provided by FEMA. Therefore, it is imperative that your unit of local government apply for FEMA funding for those expenses which are eligible through the FEMA Public Assistance program *before* submitting your application for the LGER Grant. Federal funding is available to cover up to 100% of FEMA-eligible expenses. To apply for FEMA funding, visit the Vermont Emergency Management website.
- Supporting documentation must be submitted on or before December 15th. Eligible expenses must be incurred by December 30th.

- Also, for FEMA-eligible expenses, Public Assistance applications are due September 1st. Contact Kim.Canarecci@vermont.gov if you need assistance with submitting via the FEMA Grants Portal. You need a minimum of \$3,300 in FEMA-eligible emergency response costs (e.g., PPE and overtime) to qualify.

- The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) will host a [webinar](#) on August 19th at 10am to review funding streams and grants available to municipalities to provide some clarity and direction. The webinar will be recorded and posted to the VLCT website.

- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - The SEOC acquired approximately 330,000 cloth face coverings (CFCs) through donations received by FEMA. Distribution of these CFCs is currently underway to the following entities:
 - Towns (210 towns requested allocation for 25% of their population): 143,000 CFCs
 - Towns must provide a point of contact when requesting CFCs, or the State will not be able to deliver them. If your town requested CFCs without specifying a contact, please get in touch with Eric Forand.
 - August Food Distribution Sites: 20,000 CFCs
 - Community Action Agencies: 5,000 CFCs
 - Department of Health (Equity Team, pop-up testing sites, and district offices): 18,000 CFCs
 - EMS agencies (27 agencies receiving 500 masks each): 15,000 CFCs
 - Vermont National Guard: 10,000 CFCs
 - Vermont Fire Academy: 1,000 CFCs
 - Burlington International Airport: 2,000 CFCs
 - The state's Urban Search and Rescue Team has been decanting hand sanitizer into smaller bottles for distribution, mostly to schools. After filling 15,000 bottles, they've decanted the entire supply of bulk hand sanitizer.
 - Food distributions will continue through the end of August. There are multiple food distribution sites each weekday on a regular schedule.
 - Registration for these sites is on humanresources.vermont.gov/food-help. Those without internet can call 211 to register. Registration is almost entirely full.
 - The state-run food distribution will discontinue at the end of August. The Vermont FoodBank is working on a transition plan for further food assistance in September and October.
 - In response to a need identified by the Agency of Education, the SEOC assembled some 1,500 PPE kits for school nurses to address potential COVID-19 cases and to aid in school mitigation plans.

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IV. Agency of Education: Deputy Secretary Heather Bouchey

- School/town coordination on COVID-19 mitigation:
 - Please recognize that this is a deeply challenging and stressful time for schools, as they are pressured from all angles.
 - Local officials should become highly familiar with the COVID-19 response plan of schools within their jurisdiction. There is plenty of variation in these plans.
 - Schools are looking to increase wrap-around social services this year, and could use help doing so. Any way in which local government could facilitate new partnerships (e.g., with foodbanks or poverty assistance organizations) would aid schools.
 - Many superintendents expressed that they need help arranging childcare for school-aged children when in-person school is not in session. Many schools are planning on reducing school hours, creating a childcare gap. As an example, a town-organized afterschool program could help address this gap.
 - Don't be afraid to reach out proactively to local schools. The local perspective of superintendents and principals makes them better contacts than state officials.
 - The Agency of Education and the Department of Health released [revised health guidance for schools](#) this week, based on updated COVID-19 research.
 - The revised guidance changes the social distancing requirement for younger students (grade K-5) from 6 feet to 3-6 feet. This alteration, based on a greater understanding of the spread of COVID-19 in pediatric populations, gives schools more flexibility in arranging classrooms.
 - The revised guidance also allows for daily health screenings to take place at home or on the school bus, rather than creating a bottleneck at the school entrance. Temperature checks will still occur at the school entrance.
 - The Agency of Education issued new [directions regarding fall school sports programs](#), developed with input from public health experts and educators. The guidance largely allows fall sports to proceed with public health modifications.
 - Just like classroom instruction, sports practices and other activities cannot start until September 8th.
 - The required public health modifications include requiring masks for all activities (except for cross country running, due to how spread out those athletes are); a prohibition on tournaments with more than 2 teams; and a significant change to football rules, with 7-on-7 matches replacing traditional games.
 - The Agency of Education developed new [guidance on social, emotional, and mental health supports](#). The agency worked with a slew of mental health experts, educators, and Department of Health staff on this document.
 - This is a stressful, anxiety-provoking time for teachers, administrators, parents, and students. We must recognize that and behave accordingly. This is not situation normal for school communities.
 - We advocate for a focus on adults first. Students can't feel safe unless the staff feel safe first.
 - The guidance also emphasizes supporting vulnerable students and families. Districts and schools should prepare to provide stronger wrap-around services than in past. While everyone is more fragile than usual, vulnerable youth may have fallen even further behind and might need more help.
 - Schools should plan for well-being long term. The very nature of well-being means that it must be continuously attended to.
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V. Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Deputy Secretary Ted Brady

- The [municipal public service program](#) provides small grants for towns, funding projects that improve public safety (e.g., putting up barriers, hiring staff to do COVID-19 programming). This program is funded through a community development block grant program (as opposed to the CARES Act), meaning Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) double-dipping is less of a concern. This program is first come, first served.
- A marketing microgrant program is giving \$2.5 million to communities looking to market themselves, such as advertising the reopening of businesses, the importance of wearing a mask, or an upcoming event. The goal of this program is to get money to as local a level as possible.
- An economic stimulus program is on the way, with CRF funding available for businesses. The target of this program is to get people back into restaurants and retail shores. Old habits will not return without effort.
- The [Everyone Eats initiative](#) is an innovative program connecting hungry Vermonters with struggling restaurants. This initiative is a local alternative to the State's food distribution sites. The Southeastern Vermont Community Action Agency is the fiscal agent for this \$5 million program, and is looking for restaurants to apply.
- Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) guidance for municipal operations has not changed much recently, except for the new [mask mandate](#). When in the presence of others, municipal employees must wear a mask or facial covering. So those in their own office with the door closed can take their mask off, but those who interact with the public should be wearing a mask or have one very close in case someone approaches them.
- There are 3 pieces of ACCD guidance worth highlighting:
 - *Events*. The State needs town help controlling events. When issuing permits related to events, municipalities should educate organizers on state requirements. The current caps are 75 people at indoor events and 150 people at outdoor events (with limited exceptions).
 - *Travel*. Anyone can enter Vermont, but they must follow [ACCD's travel policy](#). Unless they are arriving from a nearby county with fewer than 400 active cases of COVID-19 per 1 million residents, people entering Vermont must quarantine before traveling or after getting here. Those arriving by plane, bus, or other communal mode of transportation must quarantine after arriving (not before). Towns should help educate second homeowners about the state's travel policy.
 - The ACCD issued an important clarification yesterday that those staying at second homes can visit Vermont for less than 14 days, provided they do not leave their property while here.
 - *Municipal operations*. Cities and towns should generally follow the [ACCD guidance](#) for retail establishments or low-to-no-contact services, depending on the level of public contact in the specific situation.

VI. QUESTIONS FROM CALL PARTICIPANTS

- It is still an open question whether towns must apply for FEMA Public Assistance prior to applying for an LGER grant. The goal is to sort out this issue ahead of Wednesday's VLCT webinar.
- It is not too late for towns to request cloth face coverings, though the state will eventually run out. Reach out to the SEOC.
- There are no rules on who towns should give their allotment of cloth face coverings to, although consider directing institutions toward the private market as appropriate. Also, long-term care facilities can request coverings directly from the State. Towns are encouraged to distribute their allotment of cloth face coverings promptly.
- Towns' requested cloth face coverings should arrive within the next couple of weeks.