

4/15/20 First Responder Call Outline

I. **Welcome and Introduction:** *Deputy Commissioner Chris Herrick*

- Notes from previous calls can be found at: <https://vem.vermont.gov/COVID19FirstResponders>

II. **Executive Order and SEOC Update:** *Deputy Commissioner Chris Herrick*

- Preliminary data suggest COVID-19 cases could be plateauing in Vermont. We are cautiously optimistic, but social distancing, as well as response and protection measures, are still needed to ensure we continue on this downward trend.
- As you are all aware, the SEOC is fully activated from 0800 until 1600 every day. The SEOC is now almost fully virtual, with only call takers stationed in the Department of Public Safety headquarters.
- Governor Scott's most recent Executive Order Addenda:
 - On Friday, Governor Scott issued Addendum 9 to his Executive Order, which extends the State of Emergency and all existing mitigation orders and closures in Vermont through May 15th.
 - On April 3rd, Governor Scott issued Addendum 8 to his Executive Order, which states that local governments and private non-profit organizations that determine there is a need to provide housing to healthcare workers and first responders may provide non-congregate temporary housing to quarantine and temporarily isolate first responders and healthcare workers who have a 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 because of the risk of infecting other household members.
 - Rooms in hotels, motels, inns, and other vacation properties can be rented for this purpose, despite the executive order addendum prohibiting short-term rentals for the general public. It is important to note the execution of this provision of Addendum 8 is at the full discretion of the local jurisdiction or private non-profit that deems there is a need to provide this type of temporary housing. It's a tool in the tool kit, not a mandate.
 - Furthermore, local jurisdictions and private non-profits (such as hospitals) are eligible for federal reimbursement for these accommodations under the Public Assistance Program included in the recent Major Disaster Declaration. To be reimbursed, a community or private non-profit must first submit a request for public assistance into the Federal Grants Portal, as it would for any other FEMA reimbursement. Potential applicants should continue to keep cost documentation that will be submitted to FEMA for grants.
 - Local jurisdictions and private non-profits should establish their own contracts with lodging establishments. However, the SEOC can help locate accommodations if local entities are unsuccessful in doing so. Regardless, the cost still falls on the local entity.
- Active SEOC missions:
 - There is continued regional coordination of limited resources, especially within FEMA Region 1 (i.e., New England)
 - An example of cross state coordination of resources is that the SEOC is helping facilitate a trade of KN95 masks for surgical masks with the State of New Hampshire.
 - The SEOC is working on avenues of funding for COVID-19 expenses. On April 8th, the President approved Governor Scott's request for a Major Disaster Declaration which allows for federal assistance to supplement state and local COVID-19 recovery efforts.
 - The SEOC is working on a plan to extend the capacity of morgues and funeral homes by placing and staffing temporary mortuaries at some hospitals. We do have the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner on the call, so if you have any questions for them feel free to ask those during the Q&A session.
 - An update on medical surge capacity:
 - There are Alternate Care sites, to assist with patient overflow from hospitals, at the following locations:

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- Collins Perley Sports and Fitness Center in St. Albans
- Barre Auditorium in Barre
- University of Vermont Patrick Gymnasium in Burlington
- Champlain Valley Exposition in Essex Junction
- Spartan Arena in Rutland County
- These sites are prepped and ready to accept patients and will be operated in close coordination with healthcare facilities. These sites will primarily be used to decompress hospital load as they approach their capacity.
- The SEOC has stood up a transportation group to address coordination of resources and movement to and between alternate care sites.
- An update on isolation and recovery housing:
 - The SEOC is 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.
 - In the Burlington area, the Harbor Place isolation and recovery site has a 50-bed capacity, with 3 beds currently in use.
 - There is a lease agreement in place at the isolation/recovery facility at the Holiday Inn, in Burlington.
 - A new lease agreement is being pursued in Rutland.
- An update on PPE from the SEOC Medical Logistics Branch:
 - All PPE orders are being coordinated out of the SEOC Med Logs branch; orders should be placed through the online form than can be found on the VDH website.
 - The Med Logs Branch reports that the state is short on gowns, aprons, and goggles – all of those have been ordered.
 - Hand sanitizer is now stocked, and goggles are starting to trickle in.
 - Face shields were pushed out earlier this week to EMS and Law Enforcement agencies.
 - The recommendation is to keep a 14-day supply of PPE on hand and submit an order online if you are running low.

III. COVID-19 Overview and VDH/EMS Comments: EMS Chief Dan Batsie

- VDH modeling of COVID-19 is allowing for a fair degree of optimism that the curve is being to turn. However, especially in EMS, do not drop your guard. There is still COVID-19 community transmission, and still a lot of cases. VDH will relax PPE guidance when it is appropriate to do so.
- Data collection:
 - VDH is gathering data, such as absenteeism in EMS agencies, both to send to FEMA and for state-level awareness. There was one serious staffing shortage reporting this past week (i.e., a staffing shortage resulting in less than 50% of normal operational capacity). There were no catastrophic staffing shortages (i.e., a staffing shortage causing a complete operational shutdown of an agency).
 - VDH sent out its first weekly survey to Vermont's EMS agencies about staff changes, strategies, and mutual aid. VDH will post information from that survey on Friday. The content and presentation of that survey will evolve over the next few weeks, including development of a Vermont EMS dashboard with real-time call volume and COVID-19 response information. The goal is for everyone to have a better understanding of the operational picture and participate in solutions.
- Friday's messaging will include information on a potential protocol change, allowing EMTs to use metered-dose inhalers and nebulizers, rather than just assisting patients with their own.

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- VDH is working to get EMS education back on track. VDH completely supports hybrid class structures allowing for online learning while social distancing measures are in place, with clinicals and hands-on training to follow when possible. VDH is working with Maine EMS to jointly produce EMT class resources for online instruction.
 - Emails went out today to EMS chiefs about FEMA funding. Some EMS agencies are eligible for reimbursement of COVID-19-related expenses under the Major Disaster Declaration. If eligible, FEMA will cover 75% of costs. Vermont Emergency Management is hosting virtual workshops on applying for this reimbursement, with invitations sent in VDH EMS messaging.
 - For additional information, visit <https://vem.vermont.gov/covid19/disaster>.
 - Reach out to Kim Canarecci with questions at Kim.Canarecci@vermont.gov.
 - Yesterday, the state delivered face shields to distribution points, in addition to the PPE requested. Please pick up these face shields from the distribution points, or let VDH know if your agency does not need them.
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IV. VSP Comments: Colonel Matthew Birmingham

- Law enforcement absenteeism is low, and staffing levels are steady and strong. VSP is unaware of any new COVID-19 cases among Vermont law enforcement beyond the 3 cases reported last week.
- There are no new protocols or guidance. VSP, as well as local law enforcement, continue to use modified response protocols to limit close contacts.
- There are no new crime trends. The call volume is down 25-30%.
- All law enforcement continues to take an education posture regarding the governor's executive order. The attorney general has final say on enforcement, and issues are being resolved on a case-by-case basis. The attorney general's directive to law enforcement can be found [here](#).

V. DFS Comments: Pete Lynch, Vermont Fire Academy

- Results from the weekly fire department survey:
 - There's an increase in available staffing.
 - 93% of departments report being able to operate with minimal or no adjustments, while the remaining 7% require moderate adjustments, such as automatic mutual aid.
 - 5 counties reported firefighter exposures to COVID-19. Overall, known exposures remains very very low.
 - 2 departments offered temporary housing to exposed members. Departments with questions about temporary housing should contact the SEOC.
 - Most counties report not needing more PPE, except cleaning materials and eye protection. The SEOC is working to address these shortfalls.
 - There are no anticipated needs for more resources in the next 2 weeks.
 - For more information, and to view DFS's new data dashboard, go to firesafety.vermont.gov.
- DFS acknowledges the interest for financial incentives for volunteer firefighters. This was a topic raised last week with Representative Peter Welch, and has since been discussed with Haley Pero in Senator Bernie Sanders' office. Leonard Howard, chair of the Vermont Fire and Rescue Coalition, said financial incentives for volunteer firefighters are on the agenda for the next coalition meeting, with a goal of supporting efforts at the federal level.

VI. QUESTIONS FROM CALL PARTICIPANTS

- Dean Gilmore, New Haven Assistant Fire Chief, expanded on Pete Lynch's comments on financial incentives for volunteers. Gilmore said there is legislation for financial aid for healthcare workers and

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first responders, the HEROES Act, currently making its way through congress, but the act does not cover volunteers. Gilmore said he will keep following up with congressional staff for language to cover volunteers. Gilmore also said the Treasury Department is looking at offering hazard pay through the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) program, which should be available to responders who contract COVID-19. This would be in addition to how PSOB life insurance already covers deaths from job-related COVID-19 cases.

- VDH is unaware of problems with its supply of KN95 masks not fitting properly, despite that being a concern elsewhere. These masks have been vetted prior to purchase, and are better than not having masks at all.
- Deputy Commissioner Herrick said guidance is forthcoming on the process for decontaminating N95 masks, including the procedure for collecting and returning the masks. There will also be guidance on storing used N95 masks prior to decontamination.

If you have further questions, please fill out the survey link included in the call invitation. Contact the SEOC for urgent matters.