

7/16/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

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

- This is the biweekly call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials. The next call will be on Thursday July 30th at 2PM, again on Microsoft Teams. The invitation will go out on Monday July 27th.
 - 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, AHS Economic Benefits Director Trish Tyo, and AHS Emergency Management Director Jason Gosselin. In addition, we have Capt. Mike Manley 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

- There have been no new deaths associated with COVID-19 in the past 30 days. Also, the hospitalization rate is fairly low, with no more than 4 COVID-19 inpatients at any one time since mid-May. Outbreaks around the state are causing the case count to fluctuate, but metrics of serious illness stay low.
 - The largest outbreak so far is in Winooski and Burlington, with 117 associated cases. New reported cases have plummeted, so we're hopeful that the worst of that outbreak is over.
 - There was a cluster in Fair Haven with 12 associated cases (10 of which were New York residents). There have been no new cases associated with the cluster since June.
 - There have been various clusters of cases at Chittenden County workplaces with 5 to 15 patients each. These have been mostly contained.
 - There is a potential outbreak in the southwest part of the state, where a clinic in Bennington County recorded over 50 COVID-19 cases this week using antigen testing.
 - The Department of Health doesn't consider antigen testing to be definitive, but is treating the cases as presumptive positives and proceeding with quarantine measures and contact tracing.
 - The Department of Health is conducting aggressive testing in the area, working with Southwestern Vermont Medical Center and other healthcare providers. This PCR testing will provide a more accurate view of the situation and dictate next steps.
 - A Department of Corrections facility recorded a positive case, though the person in question had also tested negative three times.
- Testing/tracing updates
 - 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:
 - 7/17: Essex and Middlebury
 - 7/20: Bennington and Winooski
 - 7/21: Springfield and Burlington
 - 7/22: Brattleboro, Hyde Park, St. Johnsbury, and Rutland
 - 7/23: Barre, Burlington, St. Albans, and White River Junction

7/16/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

- 7/24: Essex and Middlebury
 - The State is prepared stand up more pop-up testing in response to outbreaks.
 - For more information on pop-up testing, and to sign up, visit [healthvermont.gov](https://humanresources.vermont.gov/popups) or <https://humanresources.vermont.gov/popups>
 - We received a question on whether the resurgence of COVID-19 around the country and the outbreaks in Vermont will lead the State to consider a mask mandate.
 - The State is not currently considering a mandate. State agencies are engaged in a messaging campaign to encourage mask use in partnership with municipalities and other entities.
 - Municipalities have the authority to require facial coverings in public places, and many have.
 - EMS updates
 - I want to once again emphasize the importance of wearing proper PPE on EMS calls. Crews at two EMS agencies recently had to quarantine following exposures to COVID-19 patients while wearing insufficient PPE. This is an avoidable problem.
 - Wear gloves, a mask, and eye protection on **every call**. It is impossible to tell whether someone has COVID-19 by appearance or on-scene symptoms, so this level of protection is always prudent.
 - If COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed on a call, wear “full” PPE – an N95, a gown, gloves, and eye protection.
 - The governor signed a COVID-19 relief bill that includes money for EMS education and helping agencies complete grant paperwork. Details are being worked out this week and next; more information is forthcoming.
 - The Office of EMS is in the final stages of planning for the virtual EMS conference – a twice-monthly series of continuing education classes slated to begin in September.
 - The [2020 EMS protocols](#) are available. The app will be updated within the next week.
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III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: Deputy Commissioner Chris Herrick

- **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 is entirely virtual.
- **Policy updates:**
 - Yesterday, the governor [extended](#) the executive order and the state of emergency for another month, until August 15th. This extension allows protections to stay in place and lets the State appropriately respond to outbreaks.
 - On Tuesday, Governor Phil Scott and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, & Markets (AAFV) announced a new [COVID-19 Agriculture Assistance Program](#) for dairy producers and processors who have experienced income loss, additional expenses, and market disruption as a result of the pandemic. The application opens tomorrow with \$25 million available for businesses through the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund.
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - Food distributions will continue through the end of August. Instead of one large food distribution site, there are now multiple smaller food distribution sites each day on a regular schedule.

7/16/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

| Date | Location |
|--------------------|--|
| Friday, July 17 | Barre, Bradford, & Bethel |
| Monday, July 20 | South Burlington, Middlebury, & St. Albans |
| Tuesday, July 21 | Rutland, Fair Haven, & Bennington |
| Wednesday, July 22 | Brattleboro, Londonderry, & Springfield |
| Thursday, July 23 | Newport, Richfield, & Brighton |
| Friday, July 24 | Barre, Morrisville, & Hartford |

- Registration for these sites is on humanresources.vermont.gov/food-help. Those without internet can call 211 to register. Registration is mostly full for July sites. Registration for August sites will be available next week.
- The Division of Fire Safety still has a large supply of free hand sanitizer available for emergency response agencies. The [request form](#) is available on the DFS and Office of EMS websites.
- **Vermont is under a Federal Disaster Declaration - DR 4532**
 - This means that the federal government will reimburse local government and some non-profits for many costs associated with responding to COVID-19. Information on how to apply and eligible costs can be found on the VEM website at: vem.vermont.gov/covid19/disaster.
- Vermont Emergency Management is hosting a virtual emergency preparedness conference on September 29th and 30th. The conference will cover relevant emergency management topics in sessions running from 1pm to 5pm on both days. More information is on the VEM website: vem.vermont.gov/conference
 - Vermont Emergency Management is seeking nominations for the 2020 Emergency Management Director of the Year, to be recognized at the conference. Please help us recognize the excellent work and achievements being made by Vermont Emergency Management Directors by filling out the [2020 EMD of the Year nomination form](#) by 5pm on August 21st.
- We received a question on whether the new guidance allowing outdoor events with up to 150 people supersedes the older guidance prohibiting sports tournaments.
 - Tournament-style events with multiple teams are currently prohibited, even if they involve less than 150 people. This is because, compared to other gatherings, tournaments are more likely to involve shared surfaces, incidental contact, and participants from a wide geographic area.
 - As a reminder, the number of spectators should be limited as much as possible at sporting events, with proper social distancing and never more than 150 people in one location. Smaller venues may warrant a lower maximum number of participants.
 - Guidance on organized sports is slated to be reevaluated by August 1st -- any changes will be posted on the ACCD website and will be announced at the July 31st or August 4th press conferences.
 - Overall, if ACCD guidance appears contradictory or does not meet your specific needs, the ACCD is great about working out the specifics of a situation. For such clarification, use the "[request additional guidance](#)" form on the ACCD website, call 802-461-5143, or email ACCD.Covid19@vermont.gov.

IV. Agency of Human Services: Economic Benefits Director Trish Tyo & Emergency Management Director Jason Gosselin

- AHS is implementing a housing recovery plan, with \$16 million for initiatives such as rental assistance, case management, continued General Assistance vouchers, and a housing risk pool.

7/16/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

- Rapid resolution funds are close to being issued. These are one-time payments, upwards of a few thousand dollars, to help people move to a more permanent housing solution.
 - The [rental stabilization program](#) is live. This is a pot of money for landlords and tenants to use for past-due rent.
 - AHS continues to move families and individuals to more permanent housing solutions. At the highest point the General Assistance voucher program provided 1,530 rooms; that number is now 1,100 as the agency works to transition people.
 - Applications for the new [Health Care Provider Stabilization Grant Program](#) open tomorrow, July 17th. The program will distribute \$275 million from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to health care and human service providers suffering financial hardship from COVID-19.
 - The first round of applications is due August 15th. The grant will be managed by AHS. Grants will be awarded after all applications are received (as opposed to first come, first serve).
 - There will be two application cycles. The first cycle is for expenses incurred from March 1st through June 15th, and the second cycle (which will accept applications starting in October) is for expenses from June 16th through September 30th.
 - On Monday, July 20th, AHS and the Department of Health Access will host a webinar to discuss this grant program and how to apply.
 - On Tuesday, the Department of Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) released a [framework](#) for nursing homes and other residential facilities to use in determining how to facilitate safe visitation and congregation of residents. The guidance is divided into phases based on the specific situation at each facility.
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V. QUESTIONS FROM CALL PARTICIPANTS

- Dan Batsie will continue to try to find out why the Department of Health doesn't report county-specific statistics on those recovered from COVID-19. He also cautioned against using this statistic for local planning purposes, because it doesn't include those who haven't been tested and who aren't being monitored by the Department of Health.
- Dan Batsie said it is still too early to tell if there was a common thread (e.g., a large social gathering) to the new presumptive positive COVID-19 cases in the Manchester area.