

3/18/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

I. Welcome and Introduction: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- This is the weekly call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials.
- The next call will be on Thursday, March 25th at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, March 22nd.
- 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 myself and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie. In addition, we have Vermont State Police Captain Mike Manley, Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch, and EMS Chief Will Moran 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 page 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. 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**
 - 747 cases of COVID-19 were reported in Vermont in the last week, which is about where the state's been trending in last couple of months.
 - The 7-day average test positivity rate is 1.3%, down from 1.7% a week ago, which is encouraging.
 - 24 Vermonters are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, including 4 in intensive care and 3 on ventilators.
 - More COVID-19 statistics are available on the [Department of Health's website](#).
 - The Department of Health's Epidemiological Branch is tracking 99 outbreaks. More than 50% of these outbreaks are related to workplaces, with outbreaks related to schools and childcare the second-largest category. The good news is that outbreaks are decreasing in long-term care facilities and healthcare facilities, likely because of vaccinations.
 - Health officials identified the B.1.1.7 COVID-19 variant in Vermont, which is a dangerous thing. It's a more transmissible form of coronavirus with potential implications for the health care sector. As the state loosens public health restrictions, don't drop your guard.
- **Testing/tracing updates**
 - There is not a substantial change in [testing availability](#) – it is still available to all who want it.
- **Vaccination updates**
 - About 5,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses are being administered in Vermont each day. The latest vaccination statistics are on the [Department of Health's website](#).
 - 84% of Vermonters 75 years old and older have received at least one vaccine dose, as have 50% of Vermonters 65 years old and older. Likely as a consequence, the median age of those infected with COVID-19 is steadily declining.
 - Last week, all interested Department of Corrections staff were vaccinated.

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- Vaccination of school staff is ongoing. So far, some 9,500 teachers and school staff have received at least one dose, which is about a third of the population.
 - The next vaccination phases will be announced at tomorrow's press conference.
 - **EMS updates**
 - Updated [fire/EMS non-emergency activity guidance](#) was released on Friday reflecting the governor's recent openings of the spigot. The most notable change is that fully vaccinated groups (i.e., a group with no more than 1 un-vaccinated person in it) can train as normal, without distancing, capacity limits, or PPE. This guidance also applies to station activities, as long as the site is not accessible to the public. Groups with unvaccinated members must still follow masking, distancing, and other public health measures.
 - We received a question about whether EMS chiefs are allowed and/or obligated to keep non-vaccinated providers from responding to medical calls, especially providers in a high-risk category.
 - As state officials, we can't tell you who can and can't respond to calls.
 - Local governments can decide whether to compel their first responders to get vaccinated.
 - It's an important question, because arguably requiring vaccination is no different than requiring PPE. This is a relevant question for many employers, but the State cannot weigh in.
 - We received a question from someone who was told travel restrictions are different for EMS providers than for the public, and wanted to know the specifics.
 - There is not different travel guidance for EMS providers.
 - It is worth noting that essential travel, including for work, is exempted from quarantine requirements for everyone.
 - The Vermont Office of EMS recently hired Bambi Dame and is happy to have her onboard.
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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.
- **Recent policy changes:**
 - Last Friday, Governor Scott announced that [two non-vaccinated households can gather at a time](#), ending the ban on multi-household gatherings imposed prior to Thanksgiving.
 - Governor Scott also announced Friday that [restaurants can now seat members of different households at the same table](#), as long as there are no more than 6 people per table and other applicable public health precautions are followed.
 - Yesterday, the state legislature and the governor passed [legislation extending Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation benefits](#) if the recipient is otherwise eligible to establish a new unemployment insurance benefit year.
- The SEOC continues to support Vermont's vaccination campaign, especially as the state's vaccine allocation increases. The SEOC is helping the Department of Health locate vaccination sites and coordinate other logistics. The SEOC is also working on disaster cost recovery and medical logistics.

IV. Questions from Call Participants

- ***How would an organization know if its staff is vaccinated? Can an organization require staff to prove they are vaccinated?*** This is a question that will have to be worked through with an attorney. EMS agencies require other vaccinations, but state officials can't speak for specific local organizations.
- ***How is health information used to qualify for COVID-19 vaccination handled and protected, and who has access to that information?*** The health information submitted by vaccine registrants is encrypted and only accessible to the staff that needs the information (e.g., those at the vaccine points of distribution) – it's not an open system. The vaccination registration system adheres to the normal HIPAA procedures.
- ***Have you heard anything about OSHA changing masking requirements in the workplace?*** The requirement has not changed. We will keep an eye on it, but PPE requirements aren't changing now.