

11/19/20 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.
- There will be no call next week due to the Thanksgiving holiday. The next call will be on Thursday, December 3rd at 2PM. The invitation will go out on Monday, November 30th.
- 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 Fire Academy Chief Peter Lynch. In addition, we have Capt. Mike Manley from the Vermont State Police 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. **DFS 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
 - 626 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Vermont in the last week. The weekly case count has doubled for the past 3 weeks, and there have been 1,200 cases in last 30 days, this is a large increase, but it's important to think about the context, how Vermont is still doing comparatively better than other states.
 - 40% of new COVID-19 cases in the past few weeks have been in Orange and Washington counties. Last night, Conor Kennedy of Agency of Human Services reached out to local government officials in Orange and Washington Counties with talking points and supportive messaging about COVID-19 guidance and recent changes in state policy. Orange and Washington counties continue to be areas of particular concern, with recent COVID-19 spread greater than in the rest of the state.
 - There have been 2 deaths associated with COVID-19 reported this week, for a total so far of 61.
 - There has been an uptick in hospitalizations, though the number stabilized in the past couple of days. Currently 15 people are hospitalized in Vermont with COVID-19, 2 of whom are in the ICU. No one is currently on a ventilator.
 - The Health Operations Center will be partially closed on Thanksgiving, but will be fully open on Friday, November 27th.
- Update on outbreaks and situations
 - The Department of Health's epidemiological team is aggressively monitoring outbreaks and situations.
 - There are currently 24 outbreaks and 163 situations in the state, 51 of which are in Washington and Orange counties.
 - 71% of situations and outbreaks are related to private parties and gatherings. This means that viral growth in Vermont is currently being fueled less by interactions at schools, restaurants, gyms, etc., and more by social gatherings.

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- Testing/tracing updates
 - The Department of Health is actively and aggressively contact tracing. The Department brought on 10 new contact tracers within the last week, with 20 Vermont National Guard personnel coming to help soon.
 - The State is also testing aggressively. In the last 4 days, there's been a 40% increase of testing in Vermont. The Department of Health is working with the private firm CIC Health to enhance and expand testing capacity. We want to provide asymptomatic testing within a 30-minute drive of every Vermonter. Five new fixed testing sites opened this week, and the State will work on more sites and more testing slots per site. The State is partnering with hospitals, healthcare centers, and EMS agencies in this effort.
 - This increase in testing will not be enough to satisfy the huge demand. The State will continue to increase testing opportunities until demand is met.
 - We've also started surveillance testing of all teachers/school staff, with the goal to test all who want it this week, then testing a quarter of schools each week.
- Vaccination planning updates
 - We are all hopeful that a COVID-19 vaccination will be available soon. Word is that the first doses may arrive in early December. When we do roll out the vaccine, first responders will be among the first to receive it.
 - I do want to temper expectations – there will not be enough vaccines for everyone all at once, though first responders are at the front of the line. The State is working at breakneck speed to set up vaccine distribution infrastructure.
 - The Vermont Ambulance Association asked for published vaccine information, and we will work on that in the coming days, providing the information we have and what we know about the vaccine.
- EMS updates
 - Updated [non-emergency activity](#) and [EMS education](#) guidance is now on the Office of EMS website. In-person EMS education is critical, so we're looking to sustain it as long as we can. The guidance includes more stringent language about avoiding unnecessary gatherings. But in-person gatherings are sometimes essential for EMS education, internships, etc. Providers cannot be certified without hands-on practice, so we have to make sure we have good guidance for that with the necessary precautions.
 - Information on two new grant programs went out to EMS agencies this week:
 - An agency stabilization grant, designed to offset lost revenue associated with decreased call volume this past spring.
 - A workforce stabilization grant, providing funds to licensed providers involved in COVID-19 response.
 - The Department of Health hired a new EMS chief, Will Moran, formerly of Essex Rescue. He has a great background in EMS and firefighting, he's well educated, experienced, and I look forward to introducing him to all of you. We are still working out a start date.
 - Now is the time for vigilance. I've talked to 5 different EMS agencies this past week which had staff in quarantine due to not following appropriate PPE guidance. That's a problem. Poor PPE compliance results in more quarantined staff, impacting response and operations. It's avoidable. Keep your mask on. Be vigilant. Guidance is available on the [Office of EMS website](#). Those in Washington and Orange counties should be especially careful.
- We're all suffered from COVID fatigue and it's almost Thanksgiving. I'm tired too. But viral growth is due largely to gatherings, so think twice about your plans. We're all role models for the rest of the state. Be vigilant, stay safe.

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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 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.
 - The SEOC will be in monitoring status for Thanksgiving on Thursday, November 26th, but will be activated as usually the day after, Friday, November 27th. Staff remain available 24/7, from the Department of Health, Emergency Management, and other state agencies. They are all devoted to combating COVID-19; they are utmost professionals. Their work keeps them away from their families. I harp on this because we all have to work together to keep our citizens informed and emphasize that if gatherings with multiple households continue and if we don't wear masks, COVID-19 will get worse. People need to know that their friends and neighbors are making sacrifices, so we all need to buckle down and sit this out a bit longer. There's light at the end of the tunnel. To the extent that you can role model appropriately cautious behavior and reemphasize its importance, it makes our jobs and your jobs easier.
 - The SEOC completed its transition to WebEOC, its new emergency management software platform. We hope to make WebEOC available to local jurisdictions for their emergency management needs, but it will be a few months yet.
- **Recent policy updates:**
 - At the Press Conference on November 13th, Governor Scott announced Addendum 8 to the Executive Order, extending the State of Emergency through December 15th, and implementing several temporary limitations on social gatherings and business operations, meant to curb the spread of COVID-19 as cases and hospitalizations rise:
 - **Multiple Household Social Gatherings Suspended:** Attendance at all public and private social, recreational and entertainment gatherings, indoor and outdoor, including large social gatherings incidental to ceremonies, holiday gatherings, parties and celebrations, will be limited to participation with only members of a single household. Individuals who live alone may gather with members of their immediate family residing in a different household.
 - **Restaurant Hours and Seating Limits:** Restaurants must close in-person dining at 10 p.m., but may provide curbside and delivery service after 10 p.m. For in-person dining, restaurants must seat only one household per table, in accordance with existing capacity limits and the new restriction on multi-household gatherings.
 - **Closure of Bars and Social Clubs:** Bars and social clubs will be closed for in-person service until further notice. Curbside and delivery service is allowed.
 - **Pausing Recreational Sports:** Youth and adult recreational sports activities, not related to Vermont Principals Association-sanctioned school sports, are suspended until further notice.
 - **Telework Requirements:** All businesses, non-profits and government entities shall reinstitute telework policies for all employees to the maximum extent possible. In-person meetings are strongly discouraged and should be held by telephone or video conference whenever possible.
 - **Contact Tracing and Testing Requirements:** All restaurants and other businesses hosting non-essential activities shall maintain a 30-day log of employee and guest names and contact information in case contact tracing is required by the Health Department. These individuals are

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consenting to be contacted by the Health Department Contact Tracing Team. Further, all Vermonters are directed to comply with requests made by the Contact Tracing Team.

- There have been instance of Vermonters not complying with contact tracers, which delays their work and allows further viral spread. Getting a call from a contact tracer doesn't mean you're in trouble – it's necessary to stop the spread.
- **College Student Quarantine:** Finally, college students returning home in Vermont (from in-state and out-of-state schools) shall quarantine for 14 days or seven days with a negative COVID-19 test and testing is strongly encouraged.
- On Monday, Agency of Human Services Secretary Mike Smith suspended hospital visitation, with limited exceptions for support persons and parents/guardians.
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - Alternate care sites:
 - Currently, the Chittenden County medical surge site is being returned to warm status, which will allow for it to be staffed and accept patients if needed to decompress the hospitals.
 - There is also a portable hospital on standby in Rutland, which can be mobilized in that region, if needed.
 - The Alternate Care Site planning group will continue to assess modeling for potential patient overflow. Currently, the main focus is ensuring that hospitals are able to employ their *internal* surge plans before the need to expand operations to external medical surge sites. The planning team continues to coordinate with VDH and the Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (VAHHS) about existing capabilities.
 - External medical surge sites will be activated strategically to decompress the overall healthcare system in the state, so while a site may not be directly set up in a particular county or community does not mean it is not serving your residents. Patient coordination will continue to occur as the situation progresses, led by the UVM and Dartmouth-Hitchcock transfer centers.
 - We've received a question about the possibility of reopening the overflow site in St. Albans used in the spring. We will continue to assess the modeling in the coming weeks, looking at the concentration of cases, and adjust our plans as warranted. There are no current plans for alternate care sites beyond the ones in Essex and Rutland.
 - The Farmers-to-Families food box program, run by the Vermont Foodbank, started up again this week and will continue through December 31st. The first two weeks of reservations are full. The next two weeks of reservations will be posted at a later date and online at www.dhr.vermont.gov/food-help.
 - The SEOC continues to support vaccine planning and is working on a plan for receipt and distribution of a vaccine.
 - Surveys went out to EMS, fire, law enforcement, and dispatch agencies across the state to gather lists of active personnel.
 - If your agency did not receive a survey, or has questions about it, please reach out to VEM's Rich Cogliano at Richard.Cogliano@vermont.gov.
 - These first responders, along with healthcare workers, are prioritized for the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, however that doesn't guarantee doses by a particular date or all first responders at the same time. Distribution plans are still being developed, and administering vaccines to everyone will take time.
 - We might see the first doses enter the state in the coming weeks.

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- We received a question on whether the Local Government Expense Reimbursement (LGER) grant program might get extended, especially to account for purchases that weren't eligible because they're on backorder.
 - VEM's Ben Rose is tracking down an answer to the specific situation of backordered items and will reach out with a response.
 - Generally however, we unfortunately do not anticipate an LGER extension at this time, though we recognize that municipalities continue to need financial support, so there may be additional rounds of funding or new grant programs in the future – dependent on federal legislation and other factors we can't foresee now.
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IV. Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn

- The State's messaging to Washington and orange counties will be in the VLCT update email tomorrow.
 - We received questions from multiple towns about how to handle staffing of essential services (road crews, wastewater treatment facilities, etc.) given the increased spread of COVID-19 throughout the state. We have two recommendations:
 - All towns should review and update their continuity of operations plans. Vermont Emergency Management has a [template for local continuity of operations plans](#) on their website. Review it before you need it.
 - The Vermont League of Cities and Towns has a [mutual aid template](#) on our website. Quite a few towns have adopted mutual aid agreements and should be ready to activate them should that be necessary.
 - Towns may have already have mutual aid agreements and just forgot about them.
 - Vermont Local Roads will host a [webinar](#) on December 2nd from 1:00 to 2:30 pm on the potential effects of COVID-19 on municipal operations.
 - It is more complicated to bring in private folks (as opposed to other towns' folks). If towns want to pursue this option, they should reach out to VLCT and their insurance provider.
 - The bottom line is that you should do everything you can to plan for these contingencies now, so you're prepared if things get worse.
 - We received a question on whether food shelves within municipal buildings can remain open if municipal operations shut down.
 - Local legislative bodies decide when and how to use municipal buildings. While towns are entirely within their rights to close town offices, such closures are not mandated by the state at this time.
 - Food shelves can continue to operate, as long as normal COVID-19 precautions are taken (e.g., distancing, masking).
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V. Division of Fire Safety: Fire Academy Chief Peter Lynch

- Resumption of fire service capabilities survey:
 - In late winter into spring, the Division of Fire Safety sent surveys out to county points of contact, asking them to reach out to the fire chiefs in their county about their capabilities. The point of the survey was to understand needed resources, both in terms of personnel and equipment.
 - We decided to start these surveys back up again, to provide clear information of the condition of Vermont's fire service.

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- The first new survey will go out to the county points of contact tomorrow afternoon.
 - The Division of Fire Safety published [updated non-emergency activity guidance](#), in line with last week's new COVID-19 restrictions in [Executive Order Addendum 8](#). These best practices apply to trainings, meetings, and other non-emergency activities, but do not apply to emergency response.
 - Screening requirements haven't really changed.
 - What has changed is guidance around classroom activities, meetings, and outdoor details. Classroom training and meetings should be suspended unless they're essential (such as practical evolutions needed to maintain certification). Another example of an essential activity is orientation to a new piece of equipment. Certification testing is also essential. Even these essential activities should be in groups of no more than 10. There can be multiple groups of 10 in a large facility, but those groups shouldn't co-mingle.
 - Outdoor training and work details can continue, including in well-ventilated bays. Again, no more than 10 people in one location.
 - During the upcoming holiday season, the Division of Fire Safety will send out wellness PSAs to Vermont responders. Share them far and wide.
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VI. Questions from Call Participants

- The Department of Health is not currently using or recruiting volunteer contact tracers, due to the time commitment it would take to train them. However, this could change. Those interested should sign up with Vermont's [Medical Reserve Corps](#), which has many deployment opportunities to support the state's COVID-19 response. If the State starts using volunteer contact tracers, we'd go through the Medical Reserve Corps.
- The State is working both to increase COVID-19 test availability and test processing capacity.
 - Vermont has a good relationship with the Broad Institute (a lab in Massachusetts where many Vermont tests are sent), and gets results from them within 3 days.
 - The State stood up 5 new fixed testing sites this week, and all reservations for those sites filled within a few hours. There's increased demand everywhere, and the State is working to ensure testing sites are geographically distributed.
- Critical infrastructure workers are one of the groups prioritized for COVID-19 vaccines. Discussions are still ongoing, and the prioritization plan will be put in front of the vaccine implementation advisory group.
- There is a nitrile glove shortage, so the SEOC and the Health Operations Center are discussing the issue, especially conservation and messaging. The Medical Counter Measures Warehouse (the State's PPE stockpile) has a relatively good supply right now. Everyone should have an eye toward PPE conservation. The rise of COVID-19 infection rates nationwide impacts Vermont's PPE supplies.
- Governor Scott and Department of Health Commissioner Levine harp on the importance of being open and honest with contact tracers at press conferences. There have also been press releases on the subject. The State will consider putting together a PSA.
- Erica Bornemann will talk to the restart team about guidance for craft fairs.
- The Vermont League of Cities and Towns will start sending out their update emails to EMDs.
- While some first responder training can be done virtually (e.g., using manufacturers' demonstration videos), virtual training is often insufficient for operational needs.
- The SEOC sends out a weekly situation report on Friday afternoon/evenings, including recent state policy updates. If you think you are not receiving these reports in error, please email DPS.SEOCSituationalAwareness@vermont.gov.

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- The State is working on strategies to make priority COVID-19 testing available to first responders. The problem is that there are many priority situations. If your agency's operations are being impacted by a delay in testing, please reach out to Dan Batsie. We can't always control where samples go for testing, but we will work with you as much as we can.