

4/1/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Outline and Talking Points

I. Welcome and Introduction: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- Welcome participants on the call.
- This is the biweekly call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials.
- We are moving back to an every-other-week schedule. The next call will be on Thursday, April 15th at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, April 12th.
- 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're joined by DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie. In addition, we have Vermont State Police Captain Mike Manley, Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch, EMS Chief Will Moran, and Vermont League of Cities and Towns Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn 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.
- Remind participants they are on mute and will remain on mute until questions at end of the call. If you have an issue unmuting through the app, please use the chat window to ask your question.

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**
 - As Commissioner Levine said recently, wanting the pandemic to be over is different than it actually being over. Other states are greatly changing public restrictions, and Vermont is loosening up a bit as well. Simultaneously, cases are up in over 30 states, and hospitalizations are up in 20 states.
 - There have been 233 new COVID-19 cases in Vermont in the 24 hours, and Monday saw the highest single-day case count at 266. There is lots of community transmission.
 - There were 1,308 cases in last week, up from the weekly totals of 700-800 in the past few weeks. There have been 4,239 cases in the last month.
 - The 7-day average test positivity rate is at 2.1%, up from 1.6% a week ago.
 - The biggest rise in infections is among 20-somethings. There has been a significant decline in infections among those aged 70 and over, which is a good sign because they're the most vulnerable.
 - There have been 4 COVID-related deaths in the past week, which is about the rate Vermont's been seeing for the past month.
 - 31 Vermonters are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, 2 of which are in intensive care and 0 are on ventilators.
 - The Department of Health Epidemiological Branch is currently managing 118 outbreaks. This high number is despite the recent change in the definition of an outbreak from 2 to 3 linked cases. Most outbreaks are associated with workplaces, schools, and childcare facilities.
 - More COVID-19 statistics are available on the [Department of Health's website](#).
- **Testing/tracing updates**
 - COVID-19 testing is still a high priority. There are appointments available across the state.

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- **Vaccination updates**

- Vermont's goal is to have all residents fully vaccinated by July 1st.
- On Monday, eligibility expanded to those 50 years old and older. 21,000 people signed up for vaccination in the first 2 days. Eligibility will expand to those 40 years old and older on April 5th.
- If the supply of vaccine that Vermont receives from the federal government continues, eligibility will open up to those aged 30 and over on 4/12, and then to those aged 16 and over on 4/19.
- About 5,000 vaccinations are being administered each day in Vermont.
- 90% of Vermonters aged 70 years old and older have been vaccinated, undoubtedly related to a recent 75% decrease in COVID-19 infections in that population.
- Some 80% of eligible educators have received their first dose of vaccine or are scheduled to do so.
- The latest vaccination statistics are on the [Department of Health's website](#).
- In addition to the expanding age eligibility, two groups are newly eligible for vaccination this week:
 - Parents and primary caregivers of children with high-risk health conditions who are too young to get vaccinated.
 - Vermonters who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color (BIPOC), including anyone with Abenaki or other First Nations heritage, along with all household members who are 16 years or older.
- The governor recently announced part-time second homeowners and out-of-state college students (defined as residents of another state who will not be staying in Vermont this summer) will become eligible for vaccination on April 30th.
- The homebound vaccination program continues. The number of scheduled appointments went down from 200 a week to 100 a week, and then 75 a week. Hopefully, this means that there are not many interested homebound individuals left to vaccinate, allowing efforts to shift to other vulnerable populations, such as those in General Assistance housing and who live/work on farms.
- We received a question on whether it's okay to laminate a CDC vaccination card after the second dose.
 - Yes, it's okay to laminate the vaccination card. Keep it legible, but there's no reason not to protect it.

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:**
 - On Monday, the governor and state legislature passed an [act extending regulatory flexibility for healthcare providers](#) through March 2022. The act requires health insurance to cover telephone-based health services.
 - On Monday, the CDC extended the [national eviction moratorium](#) through the end of June.
 - On Tuesday, Agency of Human Services Secretary Mike Smith announced that hospitals can now [allow fully vaccinated individuals to visit patients](#).
- 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

- ***As vaccination rates increase, members of the community are pushing back on public health restrictions. Our town has a high rate of infections currently, and local government is working hard to maintain restrictions. What do we say to vaccinated individuals who push back against the guidance?*** We anticipate guidance being released shortly that will contain small spigot turns for gatherings. All such changes must be done with due consideration to Vermont's record-breaking case counts and high levels of community transmission. The current public health guidance is essential to protecting those not yet vaccinated and reducing the spread of variants. The policy folks are aware that the public needs a timeline for relaxation of restrictions, and more information is forthcoming.
- ***Is there a timeline on how vaccinations are good for? Will there be a booster required?*** We do not yet know if the COVID-19 vaccine will need boosters or become annual. This topic is still being researched.
- ***Is vaccination status protected under HIPAA?*** This question is best directed to your general counsel, as we are not lawyers. HIPAA applies in different settings with different organizations. Beyond HIPAA, there's also ethical and legal considerations.
- ***Low water levels are creating water supply issues for our fire department, so we're looking to build a cistern, and are struggling to find funding sources.*** If you haven't already, check with a Department of Conservation River Engineer, and they can help you find appropriate Agency of Natural Resources funding sources. The rural water grant program may allow be applicable. Peter Lynch and Karen Horn will both follow up with more information.
- ***Can vaccinated individuals still carry and spread COVID-19? The Selectboard in my town is considering making vaccination a requirement for town employees after eligibility opens up.*** There still ongoing research, but so far it looks like vaccinated individuals can still be COVID-19 carriers, but less often than unvaccinated individuals. In other words, vaccination decreases asymptomatic transmission, but there are still a lot of unknowns. The continued risk is why Vermont is still enforcing public health restrictions for vaccinated individuals. Regarding requiring vaccination, the Emergency Use Authorization status of COVID-19 vaccines restricts whether they can be required.
- ***Is there a time limit for how long vaccination allows an individual to avoid travel quarantines? For instance, could a person vaccinated in March travel without quarantine in September.*** We don't know yet. The CDC doesn't put a time limit on their travel guidance for vaccinated individuals, but more research is needed.