

1/21/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

I. Welcome and Introduction: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- Welcome participants on the call.
- This is the weekly call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials.
- The next call will be on Thursday, January 28th at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, January 25th.
- 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 and Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch. In addition, we have Vermont State Police Captain Mike Manley 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. DFS Comments**
- V. 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**
 - Vermont continues to be in the middle of a COVID-19 surge, though the number of infections is stabilizing somewhat.
 - There have been 1,007 cases of COVID-19 reported in Vermont in the last week, compared to over 1,100 last week. The 7-day average test positivity rate is 2.5%, compared to 2.9% last week and 2.7% the week prior.
 - There are currently 50 active outbreaks and 561 active situations, ranging across schools, long-term care facilities, businesses, etc.
- **Testing/tracing updates**
 - There are 21 state-run COVID-19 testing sites today.
 - The first responder surveillance testing initiative continues. 7 Department of Health testing sites currently offer dedicated time slots for first responders, including a first responder-only day in Chittenden county going on today. I'm glad to hear that many of you are taking advantage of this new system.
 - As a reminder, first responders and municipal workers can still sign up for COVID-19 testing during normal hours; there's no need to wait for the designated times.
 - Any fire/police/EMS agency with a critical operational shortfall resulting from COVID-19 exposure should reach out to the Watch Officer. We have resources available to help agencies navigate the challenges of quarantine, testing, etc.
- **Vaccination updates**
 - Phase 1a priority COVID-19 vaccinations are nearly finished. This is the group that first responders fall into.

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- Tomorrow, a survey on vaccination progress will go out to first response agency heads. The State wants to know which agencies haven't been able to at least schedule initial COVID-19 vaccination shots yet, and know what more resources are needed to finish vaccination phase 1a.
 - Phase 2 COVID-19 vaccinations in Vermont will start on January 27. The phase will start with those 75 years old or over.
 - Registration begins on Monday, January 25, online or by calling.
 - Those unable to reach vaccination clinics will be vaccinated by local EMS and home health agencies.
 - The core message is that we'll get the vaccine to everyone but it will take time; the 75+ age band can't be done in a day. Local officials will likely get calls from their residents about vaccine availability. We're asking for patience and calm as this vaccination campaign gets underway.
 - We got a question on whether school bus drivers can be moved up in vaccination priority.
 - The State is approaching vaccine prioritization by age. We appreciate the efforts and sacrifices of frontline workers, while also recognizing that the real threat to life is to older Vermonters. That's the governor's direction, and it will remain the State's approach for the time being.
 - Department of Health Commissioner Levine, along with the Department's epidemiology staff, looked into how/when vaccinations might lessen non-emergency activity restrictions for first response organizations. It's difficult to say when immunity sets in after receiving the second dose. It's also difficult to say whether the vaccine prevents transmission to others. For the time being, the Department of Health is asking those who've been vaccinated to still follow current guidance. The State will continue to look at the science, and will revisit the topic in a month. There is not enough evidence right now to warrant a change in policy.
 - **EMS updates**
 - I'd like to note the significant contribution EMS agencies are making to the COVID-19 vaccination effort. We're making strides while the situation changes day to day. There are two main ways in which Vermont EMS agencies are contributing:
 - EMS agencies are needed to deliver the vaccine to those who cannot get to the points of distribution. The State is working with home health agencies to identify homebound individuals eligible for vaccination. 2 EMS agencies are ready to begin this effort next week, and 3 others are not far behind. The State is looking to include EMS agencies across the state. Initially the focus is on those under the care of home health agencies, before pivoting to other homebound individuals. The EMS role will grow, and the demand will grow. The State is looking to recruit more EMS agencies into this effort.
 - The second big effort is staffing Department of Health district clinics, which will start vaccinating those age 75+ starting next week. EMS providers are part of the staffing plan for these sites. EMS agencies should ensure that their state contracts are up to date, including staff rosters; we want an accurate idea of who's participating.
 - Thank you to all who signed up to aid with vaccination efforts. We've had overwhelming enthusiasm for these projects, which is evidence of the altruistic spirit of Vermont's EMS providers.
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III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

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- **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.
 - **Policy updates:**
 - On Tuesday, Governor Scott signed into law [H.48](#), a bill giving municipalities the option to mail town meeting day ballots to all registered voters and/or to postpone the date that local elections take place.
 - On Monday, Vermont moved to phase 2 of its [guidance for organized youth leagues and school-based sports programs](#), allowing for intra-team drills and scrimmages with limited contact. Masks are still required and contests between teams are still not allowed, except for distanced snow sports such as downhill and cross-country skiing.
 - **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - The SEOC continues to support COVID-19 vaccine operations, through 1) expanding capacity at high-throughput points of distribution, to ensure Vermont is ready if its vaccine allocation increases, 2) helping the Department of Health develop a community vaccination plan, and 3) amplifying public messaging.
 - The federal government awarded the Vermont contract for the upcoming phase of the Farmers-to-Families Food Box Program to Global Trading Partners, a New Jersey company. More information on the distributions is forthcoming.
 - The Biden administration is issuing a number of executive orders pertaining to the COVID-19 response, including new policy for FEMA. I advise you all to keep an eye on the national news, as new information is coming out fast and furious. FEMA and Vermont are working together closely to disseminate information and coordinate pandemic response.
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IV. Division of Fire Safety: Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch

- Fire service capabilities survey
 - The most recent survey results suggest slightly improving responder availability, which is great news.
 - 21% of counties indicated COVID-related staffing challenges for resp avail, consistent with results from the past few weeks.
 - We previously reported that 2 departments in Windsor county had an infected responder, leading to quarantines for a number of exposed staff. Both those situations are resolving, and there are no new issues in Windsor county.
 - One Vermont fire department is using automatic mutual aid in response to reduced responder availability.
 - 36% of counties reported known COVID-19 exposures among their firefighters.
 - No counties reported a need for additional resources or anticipated a need during the next couple of weeks.
 - While there are isolated issues, overall this week's survey shows that we are, as a fire service, better positioned to handle emergencies than in recent weeks. We look forward to those numbers continuing to look favorable.
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V. Questions from Call Participants

- Vermont's vaccine allocation from the federal government is lower than we'd like. We are ready to push everything off the shelf as soon as we receive it, but certainly our capacity is going to be larger than our supply.
- The Department of Health will look into coordinating with municipal Emergency Management Directors, Meals on Wheels programs, and senior centers to identify vulnerable populations by age group (e.g., who would require at-home vaccinations).
- The at-home vaccination program will continue when younger age cohorts are vaccinated.
- The vaccine supply does not match the need, including for the homebound population. The Department of Health is starting with those in the home health program, but we know there are other vulnerable populations that can't get to clinics. As capacity and allocations increase, we will expand at-home vaccinations. We want advocacy groups and stakeholders involved, but understand that it won't be instantaneous.
- It takes the Office of EMS a couple weeks to draw up a contract after receiving the needed paperwork. Questions and concerns on this process should be directed to Will Moran.
- It is not currently feasible for municipalities to run their own vaccine distribution sites, because 1) there is a complex logistical system associated with the vaccine rollout and 2) the limiting factor for vaccinations is supply, not administration capacity. The Department of Health is figuring out what to do with offers of assistance from nurses and other personnel qualified to administer vaccines. We don't have a system for them yet, but are working on it.
- Municipal officials should direct residents requiring technical assistance signing up for the vaccine to the State's registration phone line (the number for which will be published on Monday). We want to keep that system centralized. Cities and towns can help by publicizing the State's registration contact information next week.