

## 3/25/21 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, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, March 29<sup>th</sup>.
- 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 you will hear from myself and 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.

#### AGENDA:

- I. Intro/call format
- II. COVID-19/VDH overview
- III. SEOC overview/VEM comments
- IV. Q&A with participants

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### II. COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments: HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

#### • Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont

- The number of new COVID-19 infections in Vermont has been trending downward until today, when 173 cases were reported. Regardless, there have been fewer cases in the last week than in the previous few weeks.
- The 7-day average test positivity rate is 1.6%.
- The median age of those newly infected is now 29.
- The number of COVID-19 deaths is decreasing. Vermont has the second-lowest fatality rate in the United States.
- 23 Vermonters are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, including 5 in intensive care and 1 on a ventilator. The number of people hospitalized is down 62% since the February peak.
- More COVID-19 statistics are available on the [Department of Health's website](#).
- The Department of Health Epidemiological Branch is tracking 110 outbreaks, which is about 10 more than a week ago. 51 outbreaks are in workplaces, 40 are in schools and childcare facilities, 6 are in long-term care facilities, and 3 are in prisons.
  - It's frequently asked why there continue to be COVID-19 outbreaks in long-term care facilities even after vaccinations. The issue is that not all residents and staff can or wants to get vaccinated, and even those who do get vaccinated need time to build immunity.
- The Department of Health is concerned about COVID-19 variants. Last week, Vermont health officials [identified the first lab-confirmed cases of the B.1.429 COVID-19 variant](#) (first detected in California) in the state, along with additional cases of the B.1.1.7 variant (first detected in the United Kingdom). B.1.429 is 20% more transmissible than normal COVID-19, and B.1.1.7 is 50% more transmissible. Both variants appear to be responsive to vaccination.
- Vermont is not out of the woods yet. We're seeing some promising numbers and some public health restrictions are loosening, but it's not the time to abandon all precaution. Less spread would also result in fewer variants.

## 3/25/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

- **Testing/tracing updates**
    - The Department of Health is no longer recommending surveillance testing for first responders, and there will no longer be time set aside at testing sites for first responders. However, first responders can still get tested as often as they want by [registering at public testing sites](#). If there is ever an incident for which public testing is insufficient, reach out to the state's Watch Officer and the Department of Health will bring resources to bear.
  
  - **Vaccination updates**
    - The goal is for all Vermonters to be fully vaccinated by the first of July. We're entering week 9 of the vaccination effort and are vaccinating 5,000 Vermonters a day.
    - The latest vaccination statistics are on the [Department of Health's website](#).
    - 66% of Vermonters aged 65 or over are vaccinated, which is higher than in any other state. This is a testimony to the hard work of public safety, the Department of Health, and emergency management.
    - All these vaccines are making an impact. There has been a 75% decrease in COVID-19 infections among those 70 years old and older, and fewer cases in long-term care facilities. The median age of those newly infected has fallen to 29 years old.
    - 23,000 childcare and school staff have been vaccinated, and that effort is ongoing.
    - At-home vaccination of the homebound is also still going, thanks to the Department of Health's EMS partners. Over 3,400 people have been vaccinated through this effort.
    - On Friday, Governor Scott announced a [schedule for opening vaccine registration to all adult Vermonters](#). Registrants should be able to schedule an appointment within 3 weeks of the opening date and be fully vaccinated within 2 months of that date.
      - 3/25: Those aged 60 and up
      - 3/29: Those aged 50 and up
      - 4/5: Those aged 40 and up
      - 4/12: Those aged 30 and up
      - 4/19: Those aged 16 and up
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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:**
    - Effective yesterday, bars and clubs (such as Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and the Elks) can follow the state's [restaurant guidance](#), allowing for operation with certain restrictions (such as capacity limits and distancing). Municipalities have the option to set stricter restrictions.
  
  - 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.
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## 3/25/21 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

### IV. Questions from Call Participants

- ***If I have a department member with a possible exposure who needs to be tested, can they just walk into a state testing site, or do they still need to register through the testing portal?*** They would need to register for a test, but most locations have wide availability. If you have trouble accessing testing, reach out to the Department of Health.
- ***Is there any way to report out how many homebound folks have been vaccinated in specific communities?*** The Department of Health might be able to provide that information, Dan Batsie will look into it. County-level statistics would be more easily obtainable.
- ***How are managers expected to deal with employees, town officials, or others in an organization who, for whatever reason, refuse to get vaccinated but would otherwise be expected to participate in departmental activities? Given HIPAA, are managers allowed to ask if an employee or participant has been vaccinated and adjust accommodations if they have not?*** This is a tricky situation. First of all, provide your employees with resources, such as the Department of Health website, to help separate the rumor mill and bad science from actual recommendations. Regardless of whether people decide to get vaccinated, we want them to decide using good information. In terms of compelling employees to get vaccinated, that's a question for your legal counsel.
- ***Does the vaccine registration code the State provided to first response agencies work for vaccination clinics at drug stores?*** Pharmacies just require identification upon scheduling and receiving vaccination. The registration code is for state-run clinics.