

1/28/21 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, February 4th at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, February 1st.
- 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 Vermont State Police Captain Mike Manley. In addition, we have Division of Fire Safety Director Michael Desrochers and Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch 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. VLCT Comments
- IV. SEOC overview/VEM comments
- V. VSP 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

- Vermont's daily new case count has been pretty stable over the last 2 weeks at a bit over 100 new cases a day. There have been 943 cases reported in the last week. The test positivity rate is 2.2%, down from 2.5% last week.
- So far, there have been 172 deaths associated with COVID-19 in Vermont, including 4 in the last week and 43 in the last 30 days. There are currently 50 Vermonters hospitalized with COVID-19, including 8 in intensive care and 2 on ventilators.
- The Department of Health's Epidemiological Branch is monitoring an outbreak in Washington county with 65 associated cases. The outbreak is resulting in a higher rate of infection, not does not constitute a specific threat to the community and there is no need for local intervention.

• Testing/tracing updates

- The Department of Health continues to offer dedicated time slots for first responder COVID-19 testing, available on the [registration website](#).
- There are also a lot of testing slots available for the public.

• Vaccination updates

- So far, 47,249 Vermonters [received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine](#), including 14,297 people who received both doses. This represents less than 10% of Vermont's population, but capacity is increasing every week. Vermont's federal allocation of vaccines is the limiting factor, but we believe that the allocation will soon rise. Vermont is standing up more and more capacity, including bringing in new vendors.
- This week, the community vaccination campaign started in Vermont with those aged 75 and over. Priority vaccinations for healthcare workers and long-term care facility residents are still ongoing.
 - There are rumors that the priority vaccination program ("phase 1a") has been shut down. This is incorrect, however some hospitals received fewer vaccines from the federal government than anticipated and had to cancel some vaccination clinics. The Department of Health is working

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with Vermont's hospitals to keep priority vaccinations going, and we anticipate that allocations will rise.

- Those eligible for priority vaccinations who keep getting told by the local hospital that vaccines are unavailable should reach out to the Department of Health. Be patient when dealing with hospitals, but those still unable to schedule vaccinations after about a week should contact the Department of Health. We understand that the need for priority vaccinations will continue, for instance for newly hired staff.
 - **EMS updates**
 - Vermont's EMS agencies will play a large role in getting vaccines to homebound individuals, and the Department of Health is working on setting that up. We've run into challenges on CDC guidelines on the transportation of vaccines, resulting in a bit of a holding pattern. As that issue is resolved, the Department of Health is still developing contracts with EMS agencies.
 - The Department of Health contracted with 38 Vermont EMS agencies to provide staffing at vaccination clinics, and we appreciate their help. As vaccinations ramp up, the role for EMS will likely increase.
 - The Office of EMS continues its normal work on licensing, testing, etc. Will Moran, Vermont's new chief of EMS, is fully installed in the position.
 - We received a question this week about guidance on wearing multiple face coverings.
 - There are definitely questions about the effectiveness of simple homemade masks, especially in the face of the new COVID-19 variants. There is not yet new masking guidance, but that may change. The Department of Health's Epidemiological Branch is looking into it.
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III. Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn

- The Agency of Commerce and Community Development has issued new guidance on Annual Meetings.
 - The new guidance can be found on the ACCD website under section [13.1 Special Guidance for Annual Meetings](#). A link to this guidance will be posted in the chat.
 - In-person town meetings are strongly discouraged by the governor, secretary of state, and VLCT, but they are not prohibited.
 - If a town does host an in-person meeting, social distancing, building capacity limits, health screening, and cloth facial covering protocols must be followed. Towns must also keep a log of all staff and attendees with contact information for 30 days. There can't be associated events (e.g., potlucks). The town must notify residents of these changes to procedure ahead of time.
 - It will be difficult to comply with the guidance for an in-person town meeting day, so instead it would be better to use Australian mail-in ballots. Delaying town meeting day is also an option.
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IV. 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.
- **Weather update:** A wind chill advisory is in effect from midnight tonight through 11am Friday for the western slopes of the Greens and all of eastern VT; wind chills could be as low as -25 tonight. It will be cold this weekend with overnight lows near 0 to -15 in some locations, but the National Weather Service hasn't issued any advisories into the weekend at this point.
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**

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- The SEOC continues to support COVID-19 vaccine operations, through 1) expanding capacity at high-throughput points of distribution in partnership with the Vermont National Guard, 2) helping the Department of Health develop a community vaccination plan, and 3) amplifying public messaging.
 - The federal government awarded the March and April Vermont contract for the Farmers-to-Families Food Box Program to Global Trading Partners, a New Jersey company. Coordination between the company and the State is ongoing. More information on the distributions is forthcoming.
 - The Biden administration is issuing a number of executive orders pertaining to the COVID-19 response, including a clarification for the role of FEMA in the vaccination effort. We've seen an enhancement in FEMA's role as the agency works more with local health officials. We've also seen offers of federal support increasing.
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V. Vermont State Police: Captain Mike Manley

- Vermont State Police are still in a modified response posture. Some calls that previously would've led to an in-person response are now dealt with over the phone. However, state police still respond to crimes and safety issues.
 - There was a complaint recently from an EMS agency that didn't get the law enforcement response they wanted, and we've addressed that situation.
 - Any fire/EMS personnel who disagree on whether a call requires a law enforcement response should reach out to a supervisor and discuss the situation. I am available for questions too and can direct you to the right supervisor. Dispatching appropriately can be difficult because every call is different.
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VI. Questions from Call Participants

- Dan Batsie will look into whether it's possible to provide a COVID-19 test positivity rate for each county.
- There is no one specific outbreak or other cause for the high COVID-19 transmission rate in Bennington county.
- We do not yet know if there will be a vaccination phase between the one for the elderly and the one for the general population (e.g., for frontline workers). The State is currently focusing on older Vermonters because they are the most at risk of serious illness and death.
- The frontline worker protections in Act 150 will be extended until 30 days after the state of emergency ends, pending the enactment of [bill S.9](#).