

## 12/30/20 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 back at our regular day and time: Thursday, January 7<sup>th</sup> at 2pm. The invitation will go out on Monday, January 4<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 we will hear from representatives from the Commissioner of Public Safety Michael Schirling and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie. In addition, we have Vermont State Police Captain Mike Manley, Fire Academy Chief Peter Lynch, and Division of Fire Safety Director Michael Desrochers 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. DPS Commissioner Comments
- III. COVID-19/VDH overview
- IV. SEOC overview/VEM comments
- V. Q&A with participants

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### II. **Department of Public Safety Comments:** Commissioner Michael Schirling

- Thank you for all your work during the most challenging year in recent memory, or possibly even modern history.
- I just got off a call on Vermont's COVID-19 vaccination strategy, and can answer questions on that topic.

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

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont
  - The number of new cases of COVID-19 each day in Vermont has plateaued this past week at less than 100 per day. The test positivity rate is also staying stable around 2%.
  - There have been 67 deaths associated with COVID-19 in Vermont in the last 30 days. The number of deaths has been creeping up; December has been the deadliest month of the pandemic for Vermont. 70% of Vermont COVID-19 deaths in December were associated with long-term care facilities.
- There are currently 43 outbreaks and many more situations, spanning every sector of society.
- Testing/tracing updates
  - The state's testing sites are currently on a holiday schedule, with about 5 sites open today, none open tomorrow, and 3 open on New Year's Day, to give the laboratory staff and other testing staff a break.
  - First responder surveillance testing
    - First responders can and should use public testing sites. Go to the [Department of Health website](#) to register.
    - We also recognize that first responders have unique challenges related to COVID-19 testing, so we wanted a way to give them priority. So, 11 testing sites around the state will put aside time one day a week for first responders.

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- The hope is that this block of time makes it easier for departments to conduct surveillance testing (i.e., test a substantial proportion of their staff on a regular basis).
- The higher population density in Chittenden county requires a different strategy. Instead of some time each week, a testing site in Williston run by the Vermont National Guard will offer first responder-only testing 1 day a month. This will likely start on January 20<sup>th</sup>, though that isn't quite finalized yet. Specifics will be announced next week.
- There will be a virtual form for first responders to fill out prior to arriving at these testing events. The form will be made available with the announcement next week.
- The Health Operations Center formalized rapid response opportunities for first response organizations impacted by COVID-19 exposure. Reach out to the Watch Officer 24/7 to activate this response, with can include testing and epidemiological support.
- Anyone confused by contradictory exposure guidance should refer to the [Department of Health's website](#), which – for instance – has clear guidance on when people infected with COVID-19 can return to work.
  - Requiring a negative COVID-19 test before an employee returns to work is fraught and not recommended. Instead, return to work should be based on symptoms and time elapsed since the first positive test (as detailed on the website).
- Vaccination updates
  - The State continues to vaccinate the Phase 1a population (healthcare workers and long-term care facility residents).
    - Overall, hospitals did a good job reaching out to their area EMS agencies to distribute the vaccine. Any EMS agencies having trouble accessing the vaccine should reach out to the Vermont Office of EMS.
  - After Phase 1a concludes, a broader COVID-19 vaccination campaign will begin based on age. The first group will be those 75 years old and older, then 70 and older, then 65 and older, etc.
    - We've heard concerns from first responders about this prioritization strategy and passed those up the chain. We just held a meeting with law enforcement and firefighting agencies on this topic and appreciate their feedback. We want to take care of that population.
    - EMS agencies will play a role in vaccine distribution. Some agencies got their contract from the State already, others are coming soon. The goal is to establish a large staffing pool for the next stages of vaccination starting in late January, early February; it's all hands on deck. Dr. Daniel Wolfson is working on changing the EMS scope of practice; a training program went out and there will be more information early next week on involving EMTs.
- EMS updates
  - Vermont's new EMS Chief Will Moran started on Monday, taking over Dan Batsie's old role. Chief Moran brings a rich background in EMS and firefighting, including 14 years with South Burlington Fire Department and more recently serving as the executive director of Essex Rescue. Moran will work both on EMS matters and COVID-19 response.
  - When we look back on 2020 and its difficulties, we also remember the victories. Vermont has the lowest rate of death from COVID-19 in the nation and that's a true reflection of our work. It's a testament to work of all those in public safety and public health. It's been a difficult year, but we've protected our citizens better than any other state. Thank you to all those working to get us to that goal. Happy new year, stay safe.

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- There will be some active weather on New Year's Day and the following days. The impact will primarily be on transportation and travel conditions as 2 to 3 weather systems enter the state bringing snow, sleet, and freezing rain. Pay attention to updates from the National Weather Service.
  - **SEOC status:** The SEOC remains activated every weekday from 0800 until 1600. On weekends and New Year's Day, 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.
  - On Sunday, the new federal \$900 billion coronavirus assistance relief bill was signed into law.
    - This act extends how long states have to spend Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF). VEM's Guide House consultants are still reviewing the new legislation to determine how the extension will impact Vermont.
    - We do know that the act is limited in regards to direct assistance to state and local government.
    - We received a question on whether there's funding available for fire departments that couldn't hold their normal fundraisers due to COVID-19.
      - We are not aware of such a program in this newest legislation, though we are still sifting through the act. If we become aware of funding opportunities for fire departments or others, we will share that information.
    - FEMA-eligible costs (e.g. PPE for dealing with COVID-positive individuals) can continue to be submitted to FEMA through the Grants Portal at any time (reach out to [kim.canarecci@vermont.gov](mailto:kim.canarecci@vermont.gov) if you have questions or need assistance regarding FEMA eligibility and/or on-line submittal process).
  - **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
    - The SEOC stood up a Planning Unit to start planning for high-throughput PODs if we receive more COVID-19 vaccines than can be handled by healthcare providers, pharmacies, and Department of Health district offices. This unit includes staff from the Department of Health, Vermont National Guard, and Vermont Emergency Management.
    - Emergency service organizations with service interruptions due to COVID-19 should reach out to the SEOC. Our Safety and Security Branch is focused on helping with exactly these sorts of requests. The SEOC can be reached 24/7 at 800-347-0488.
    - There are also ongoing SEOC missions regarding PPE orders and deliveries, among other background tasks.
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### V. Questions from Call Participants

- EMS workforce stabilization grant funds are currently being distributed. Some agencies received their funding already, while others will soon.
- We are unaware of any singular cause of the high active case count in Bennington County. There are outbreaks in the area, but none large enough to single-handedly explain the county's current coronavirus statistics.
- Haley Pero of Senator Sanders' office said she would be happy to connect with any local officials with questions about the new federal relief package.
- Any first response agency chief with questions about COVID-19 vaccine prioritization, especially those who missed today's 2:30 call, should reach out to the SEOC for information, including a summary of that call.