

7/30/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

I. **Welcome and Introduction:** Director Erica Bornemann

- This is the every-other-week call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials. The next call will be on Thursday, August 13th at 2PM, again on Microsoft Teams. The invitation will go out on Monday, August 10th.
 - 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 EMS Chief Dan Batsie, AHS Residence Director Michelle Lavallee, AHS Emergency Management Director Jason Gosselin, COVID Support VT Project Director Cathy Aikman, Recovery and Mitigation Section Chief Ben Rose, and Karen Horn from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. In addition, we have Capt. Mike Manley from the Vermont State Police, Director Michael Desrochers from Division of Fire Safety, and Chief Pete Lynch from the Vermont Fire Academy 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.
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II. **COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments:** Health Operations Center Incident Commander and EMS Chief Dan Batsie

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont:
 - The good news is that COVID-19 has been on a flat trajectory in the past 30 days in Vermont, with 199 new cases in that time period. Vermont's case rate is the second lowest in the country, behind Hawaii.
 - Within the last 24 hours, Vermont reported its first COVID-19-related death since June. One COVID-19 patient is currently hospitalized, and only four COVID-19 patients have required critical care since the first of June.
- Update on outbreaks and clusters:
 - Outbreaks and clusters of COVID-19 cases continue to occur, which is expected. This is the new normal, making testing and contact tracing essential.
 - The largest outbreak thus far was in Winooski and Burlington, with a total of 117 associated cases. There have not been new cases associated with that outbreak for some time now.
 - There are new clusters of COVID-19 at Chittenden County worksites, all with fewer than 5 cases and no new associated cases in clusters since July 22nd.
 - There are also three COVID-19 cases associated with a restaurant in Franklin County, but it is believed this cluster is confined to some close contacts.
 - New situations are developing, but there is not yet enough information to share about those.
- Testing/tracing updates
 - As of today, roughly 1 out of 10 Vermonters have been tested for COVID-19.
 - Testing for symptomatic individuals is still on-demand based on health care provider referrals. In addition, there are ongoing pop-up testing sites, for asymptomatic individuals without a referral.
 - The Walgreens pharmacy in Essex Junction is conducting daily drive-thru PCR testing for those 18 or older, without an appointment.
 - The State is working on bringing more private partners online to help with testing.

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- For more information on pop-up testing, and to sign up, visit healthvermont.gov or <https://humanresources.vermont.gov/popups>
 - The Department of Health has been using testing data to understand the COVID-19 landscape in Vermont. Based on that data, the Department is considering being more strategic in testing. There is no change in process yet, but frank conversations are underway about how the state's finite testing resources could be best used. These conversations may result in a shift toward prioritizing testing vulnerable populations and symptomatic individuals.
 - There has been some misinformation about testing in the workplace. Please refer to Department of Health guidance for what [employers](#) and [employees](#) should do if a colleague tests positive for COVID-19. A negative test result should not be a requirement for an employee to return to work – it is more effective to use a symptom-based approach.
 - The Department of Health is looking ahead and thinking about the direction of the pandemic, especially regarding schools reopening. A [plan for school reopening](#) is on the Department of Health website.
 - There is a great amount of optimism about the progress toward developing a vaccine. The Department of Health started planning for vaccination operations. More details are forthcoming.
 - EMS updates
 - EMS funding is a big issue this year. Two recent acts passed by the state legislative contain funds for EMS, including almost \$1 million for EMS education and licensure programs, and further funds for assistance with grant paperwork. A more detailed announcement on the latter is expected tomorrow or early next week.
 - The State Office of EMS is working on a hybrid EMT course, which is ready to be announced and will be free (as funding allows).
 - Please remember to wear your PPE! Vermont's active COVID-19 case count is low and there's mixed messages, but the minimum required PPE is still a mask, eye protection, and gloves. Please be vigilant.
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III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: Director Erica Bornemann

- **SEOC status:** The SEOC remains activated every weekday from 0800 until 1600. On the 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.
 - The COVID-19 response will be a long-term activation; there are no plans to lower the level of activation anytime soon.
- Now I will go over recent policy updates. On Saturday, August 1st, a [mask/facial covering requirement](#) goes into effect, as part of the ongoing executive order. Masks are required to be worn in public indoor and outdoor spaces where physical distancing isn't possible.
 - Exempt from the requirement are those under 2 years old, or with medical/developmental conditions that would interfere with mask wearing. Documentation of such conditions will not be required. Those eating or exercising strenuously away from others are also exempt.
 - Businesses and non-profits must notify their employees and clients of the change. Businesses can refuse service to those not wearing a mask.

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- At Tuesday's press conference, Governor Phil Scott announced he will sign an executive order calling for a universal school start date of September 8, which will give schools more time to test and fine-tune plans for the start of the academic year.
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - To coincide with the new mask mandate, the SEOC will be distributing cloth face coverings for free around the state. Distributions will occur at food distribution sites, via Community Action Partnership agencies, and via the Department of Health equity team, but most relevant to all of you is the plan to send cloth face coverings directly to municipalities.
 - Each municipality in Vermont can request a number of cloth face coverings equal to 25% of its population. 198 towns have already asked for their allotment, which is great because our intent and hope is to distribute over 200,000 cloth face coverings.
 - As local leaders, you know best how to make cloth face coverings accessible to those who need them. We are looking for your assistance in making these coverings available to your community.
 - Examples of how to distribute cloth face coverings locally include:
 - Having a distribution day at a fire station or other public building.
 - Having first responders keep extra coverings in vehicles to give to patients' families and other public contacts
 - Having them available in a box in the lobby of a town office
 - Making them available by appointment at a town office
 - Delivered directly by the Town Health Officer
 - Coordinating distribution with local organizations
 - To request cloth face coverings for your municipality, please fill out [the survey](#) that Eric Forand emailed out to EMDs yesterday. The deadline to fill out the survey is this Wednesday, August 5th.
 - The survey asks for a point of contact, so the public know who in their town to contact to get a cloth face covering.
 - Once we have received your response we will work on the best way to deliver the coverings to your town.
 - Meanwhile, the SEOC's Medical Logistics Branch has been distributing PPE to support Vermont's healthcare system, first responders, schools, and elections.
 - Specifically, 30,000 masks, 9,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, and 18,000 pairs of nitrile gloves are being distributed for the August and November elections, while 270,000 KN95 masks are going to schools for staff. Distribution of hand sanitizer and PPE are going to school nurses too.
 - Food distributions will continue through the end of August. There are multiple food distribution sites each weekday on a regular schedule.
 - Registration for these sites is on humanresources.vermont.gov/food-help. Those without internet can call 211 to register. Registration is available for the first half of August.
 - So far in July, over 12,000 households have been served at 57 food distribution sites.
- We got a question about how town officials, especially EMDs, should collaborate with schools on COVID-19 mitigation measures.
 - The best thing that EMDs and other local officials can do to support schools and reopening plans is continued compliance with -- and messaging about -- public health guidance -- staying home while sick, social distancing, washing hands, wearing masks/cloth facial coverings. Vermont's relative success in

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combating the coronavirus is due to these basic steps. General preparedness and safety measures will aid schools more than school-specific actions. We need to remain focused on these fundamentals as students return to school and colder weather causes everyone to spend more time inside.

- That said, EMDs and other local officials may want to familiarize themselves with the [school reopening plan](#) on the VDH website. Please note that this plan will be updated next week.
 - As this plan is updated, it will include guidance on responding to confirmed cases of COVID-19 in a school community.
 - Ultimately, the level of coordination between towns and schools is a local decision. We need to keep in mind that schools are distinct government entities, so towns cannot unilaterally impose unwanted assistance or restrictions. There will be opportunities for coordination, but the State doesn't want to dictate what the relationship between schools and towns should look like.
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IV. **Recovery Planning:** Recovery and Mitigation Section Chief Ben Rose

- FEMA Public Assistance cannot be used to compensate for a decrease in town revenue – what is covered by FEMA is PPE and overtime and temporary staff expenses. For more information, please visit the [VEM website](#).
 - 118 organizations in Vermont applied for FEMA assistance, including about 70 towns.
 - For towns that applied or will apply, refer to the [VEM website](#) for more information, and reach out to [Kim Canarecci](#) with any questions.
 - For those of you applying, be aware that there is no Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF). However, the state legislature allocated CARES Act funds to cover the full non-federal cost-share. This also means that there is no need to worry about ERAF scores, though having up-to-date plans is still important.
 - Towns with less \$3,300 in coronavirus-related expenses (and thus ineligible for FEMA Public Assistance) can still apply for the [Local Government Expense Reimbursement \(LGER\) grant program](#), managed by the Department of Taxes.
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V. **Agency of Human Services:** Residence Director Michelle Lavallee, Emergency Management Director Jason Gosselin, and COVID Support VT Project Director Cathy Aikman

- COVID Support VT Crisis Counseling Program (CCP)
 - The CCP helps communities and people heal and build resilience after disaster. CCP usually uses a community-based model with teams of two counselors going door to door to check on people, making sure they're okay and referring them to mental health services as appropriate. The CCP is meant to augment existing services.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic required changes to the CCP to account for social distancing. The model currently being used is less community based right now, and is instead more reliant on virtual platforms and social media.
 - Twitter: <https://twitter.com/COVIDSupportVT>
 - Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/covidsupportvt/>
 - Instagram: <https://instagram.com/covidsupportvt?igshid=1ipao6gtfyqhn>
 - Website: <https://covidsupportvt.org/>
 - The CCP is funded by FEMA, through the Vermont Department of Mental Health. The program will run until Spring 2021.
 - The first phase, which is ongoing, focuses on immediate services, including outreach, education, and connecting people with existing institutions and resources. This approach is meant to be broad and

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reach many Vermonters who couldn't be reached going door-to-door, by using social media, public service announcements, and the COVID Support VT website.

- The next phase, starting in mid-September, will target vulnerable populations such as children, youth, emergency responders, and the elderly.
 - Three counselors are being hired to answer questions and connect people to resources, working within 211.
 - The hope is that the CCP mitigates the long-term mental health effects of COVID-19. The program's services are available to all Vermonters for free.
 - We received feedback about being more culturally sensitive, so we are trying to make messaging widely available while talking to organizations about local experiences. The CCP is specifically targeting the new American community in the Burlington area. The COVID Support VT website is translated into roughly 90 languages.
 - The Department of Mental Health conducted outreach with 20 partners across the state to share related resources.
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VI. Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Karen Horn

- Congressman Welch will be hosting a ZOOM meeting on Thursday, August 6 at 11:00 am for mayors, town managers and selectboard chairs. Watch for the invite in the next couple of days.
 - The congressman will provide an update on federal legislation.
 - If others are interested in being on the call, ask your mayors, selectboard chairs or town managers to forward the ZOOM invitation to you.
- Pending federal legislation (HEALS Act proposal)
 - As currently written, this senate proposal doesn't contain direct aid for local government nor additional aid for state governments. However, the house is standing firm on direct assistance to local and state government, and there also is a push for such assistance in the senate. VLCT predicts that by the time the package passes, it will likely include funding for local and state government.
- An update on how ACCD guidance impacts municipal operations
 - The ACCD Ted Brady calls on this subject ended because of low turnout.
 - There is a [municipal page on the ACCD website](#) that contains lots of useful information.
 - Generally, if town offices are open, then employees in them must adhere to VDH and ACCD guidance.
 - Office occupancy needs to be limited to 50% of fire safety occupancy, or 1 person per 100 square feet, to a maximum of 75 people.
- Vermont's primary election is on August 11th. More information is on the [Vermont Secretary of State's website](#).
- The [Local Government Expense Reimbursement \(LGER\) grant program](#), managed by the Department of Taxes, are for eligible expenses incurred by 12/30/20 that cannot be covered by insurance or other funding sources.
 - Eligible expenses include cleaning supplies, putting up screens, and reconfiguring offices for social distancing.
- There is also \$2 million available for the digitization of land records.

VII. QUESTIONS FROM CALL PARTICIPANTS

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- As asked about in the last few calls, county-by-county data on the number of recovered COVID-19 patients has been approved for publication on the [Department of Health's data dashboard](#). There is not a definite date for when that data will be available, but it is in process.
- Karen Horn said RPCs should maintain their training and outreach programs because they may yet prove useful if more stringent mitigation measures have to be reimposed.
- Karen Horn said there is not currently funding available to maintain the digital land record databases in the long term. The state legislature may address this topic in August.
- A recent change to the food distribution site sign-up form means people who are collecting food for multiple households must now complete the form multiple times.