

2/17/22 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 and local officials.
- We will be updating the VEM webpage where the Call Notes are currently posted and keeping the survey link used to ask questions active. You can submit your questions there and we will post questions and answers to that VEM webpage as appropriate. That page can be found at: vem.vermont.gov/covid19firstresponders.
- A reminder that participants are on mute and will remain on mute until questions at end of the call. If you have an issue unmuting through the app, please use the chat window to ask your question or use *6 if you are on the phone only.
- On today's call we will be joined by DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie, NOAA/NWS Burlington, Matthew Clay and AOE Ted Fischer. We will be providing you all an overview of the State EOC preparatory activities ahead of the potential flooding impact, the state's response to COVID-19, and we will have time for additional questions at the end of the call.

AGENDA:

- I. Intro/call format
- II. NOAA/NWS hazardous weather update
- III. COVID-19/VDH overview
- IV. SEOC overview/VEM comments
- V. Q&A with participants

II. NOAA/NWS hazardous weather update: (NOAA/NWS Burlington, Matthew Clay)

- **Current Radar in Vermont**
 - We are looking into a bit of a break of precipitation across most of the area, but we will see precipitation overspread the region as we head into the mid-afternoon and through the evening hours. We are still looking at storm total rainfall ranging anywhere from about an inch to an inch and a quarter across the region with potential for some slightly higher amounts across southern Vermont.
 - We will be seeing, in terms of river responses over the next 24 to 36 hours, 5 forecast points currently forecasted to go to minor or moderate flood stage ranging across from center Rutland to the Mad River/Moretown to the Winooski at Essex and Waterbury. We do have a couple river points we are worried about for some minor to moderate flooding just from open water flooding with things cresting from anywhere between about 7:00am to 12:00 tomorrow for the average crest time for the region.
 - In addition to the open water flood, we are looking at the potential for some significant ice movement over the next day or two. With the significant river rises we expect a lot of the ice and the area rivers to begin moving and potentially forming ice jams. We don't know the thickness of the ice in particular, but the general idea is we should have ice thick enough to have ice move into some narrow corridors and windy areas of the rivers we could see some that ice jam up and create some very localized flooding on the back side of the ice jams. The typical places we see from around the Winooski where we have some of these windy bends and also more so on the New York side near the Ausable, but in Vermont we are looking at a couple minor ice jams forming. It should be pretty isolated. We aren't expecting too many of those [ice jams]. The open water flooding is definitely something we are watching and will continue to revise with the river forecast center over night as we see just how much snow melts and how much rain fall we get.
 - One other concern we are looking at is the potential for a flash freeze. We are going to be dropping, we are currently 51 degrees right now and over night or so we should be dropping from the upper 40's to mid-20's pretty abruptly maybe within one hour. With all the snow and ice melt we are getting today we could easily freeze up pretty quickly once we see those temperatures drop. Given that this rainfall will wash away any salt or chemicals residue from recent snow events. We are expecting a flash freeze with pretty icy roads during the morning commutes.
 - In addition, we are looking at some light freezing rain and some light sleet between midnight until about 4:00am and 5:00am followed by a quick burst of one to two inches of snow. We have a quite

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complicated forecast as we head into the morning hours but it does look like we are going to have some pretty slick conditions for the morning commute.

- **State Emergency Operation Center Preparatory Actions-** Director Erica Bornemann
 - With the recent update of the river forecast, we are making preparations in case the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) needs to be activated in response for assistance for the flooding. We will have personnel rostered overnight tonight and into tomorrow. The SEOC will be activated tomorrow as well for COVID response operation anyway.
 - I want to send a message out to folks if you have a request for assistance, do not be afraid to use our VEM Watch Officer 800 number (800-347-0488) in case you are in need of assistance. We will also have some additional watch officers on hand tonight and tomorrow to be able to coordinate any request for assistance.
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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**
 - Vermont has a total of 110,417 total cases which includes 243 new cases. We're averaging 284 cases per day in the last 7-days. We're still in a period of decline for the case counts.
 - There has been a 23% decrease in the last 7-days and 58% decrease in the last 14-days.
 - Lowest since early November 2021
 - 7-day percent positivity now down to 5.9%. That is the lowest it has been since early January of this year.
 - Vermont Deaths are at 579 to date, including 4 new today.
 - 0.5% of all COVID-19 cases have resulted in death in Vermont.
 - 57 individuals are hospitalized with COVID-19; with 15 in the ICU and 4 on ventilators.
 - There was a 42% decrease in new hospitalizations over the past 7 days, a 22% decrease in overall hospitalizations in the past 7 days.
 - ICU is what we're keeping the closest eye on and there is a 17% decrease in ICU over past 7 days.
 - People are now coming back to get healthcare. Those are folks who stayed away from the hospital while managing other illnesses and other challenges are now coming back. This adding more burden to our hospitals.
 - Hospitalization is the largest priority in the Health Operation Center and making sure support is there when we can give it.
 - More COVID-19 statistics are available on the [Department of Health's website](#).
- **Vaccination updates**
 - We have 19 vaccination sites today.
 - Vaccine appointments can be made by visiting the [Vermont Department of Health website](#) or by calling (855) 722-7878.
 - We are preparing for the next round of vaccinations. The six months old to four year old's.
 - There has been a federal pause, we have not received approval to begin that vaccination, but we are anticipating it. Exactly when is a guess but I think we are probably likely to see approval in the springtime. We are trying to make sure all our resources are available to the age group.
 - This group is a bit of a challenge because they are distinctly different than the average person walking into a mass vaccination clinic that we have done in the last two years. We are working hard with Primary Care Physician offices and places that Pediatric Medical Homes to make sure families can have one more familiar environment, and these younger patients can get the best care they can during vaccination process.
- **Testing updates**
 - We have 19 daily test sites.

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- We're working ways to take care of our most vital critical infrastructure and thinking about ways to make sure that you have a source of testing available to you. We are working on some systems, but it is reliant on the supply chain, but to make sure rapid test are available to departments, especially public safety departments that are in personnel crisis. These are not intended for surveillance testing. We are not intending to use them as, "how do I test my people to make sure?" These would be if you are in the situation if local people who are symptomatic or multiple people who are in quarantine, we are going to have some mechanism for you to reach out to the Vermont Emergency Management Watch Officer and for us to have a cache of test that are available to meet that crisis need. We will hopefully have more details on this next week but are working this on your behalf.
 - We are preparing for a new model of testing as the supply chain for test kits begin to improve. I think you are going to see a lot of our PCR testing go to "here's your test kit, here's the instructions for using antigen when you're symptomatic." I think you are going to begin to see that shifting. We have certainly shifted that in our schools, and we are seeing good success with it, and I think given, especially the speed of which testing is needed in many cases it's the most appropriate way to test with the variants we are dealing with today.
 - This is an ongoing project that will develop over the next few weeks as we being to look at the supply chain and a number of other factors.
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IV. SEOC/VEM Comments: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- **State Emergency Operations Center status:** The SEOC remains partially activated in support of the Department of Health and other partners.
 - **PPE/Mask/Testing Updates:**
 - Rapid test and PPE are largely available on the open market now.
 - For short term operational interruption needs especially for emergency services they can still order PPE with the order form: [BGS OPC Medical Contracts webpage](#)
 - **Hospital Operations Support**
 - Many hospitals are using the state contract for nursing support.
 - Hospitals are also using the National Guard and FEMA EMS personnel.
 - The National Guard has approximately 36 staff deployed to hospitals, that's down from a high of about 60 staff deployed earlier in the month.
 - Hospitals are not going to be requesting extensions for FEMA EMS, those are on track until March 4th
 - We are continuing to provide support to the hospitals where we can.
 - We had a meeting with FEMA Administrator Criswell. One of the outstanding questions for her and for FEMA was the extension of the 100% cost share memo that President Biden released last year. That is set to expire on April 1st and we would go back to normal state and federal cost share requirements. We are hoping to hear more on the extension of that this week as well as the extension of the National Guard federal status extension.
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V. Questions from Call Participants

- **As we transition out of these calls for COVID-19, could we use this same format to start discussions/information sharing on the DPS proposed regional dispatching plan? I don't know who should coordinate this for towns but someone needs to take the lead. I am not sure if many towns have even heard about the proposal. Is this something that VEM can do? It is a much larger issue than just to fire departments because of the budget implications to town residents.** DPS and State Police are hosting every other week calls to update on the regional dispatch plan and updating on funding opportunities that are being organized to facilitate that dispatch transition. These calls are available to fire chiefs and police chiefs as well as EMS

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leadership throughout the state on an every other week basis. If folks are interested are leadership representative of an agency and haven't been able to receive that information please contact Captain Lance Burnham with that Vt State Police lance.burnham@vermont.gov or 802-878-7111.

- **Is there any guidance being provided on how towns make their decision on mask mandates?** The question relates specifically to the extension of mask mandates. The Governor has the authority as it relates to that piece of legislation to allow towns to extend mandates or not. We have not heard either way on whether that will happen. Folks may have heard in the news that Agency of Education has indicated that the February 28th timeline for universal masking as a recommendation will be allowed to lapse and go into a more revised guidance that's tied to vaccination rates and specific schools. The health department still points to the CDC indoor mask guidance. We have not backed away from that and we have heard that an update is imminent, and we will be paying attention to that and will be putting any updates based on that recommendation.