

1/27/22 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, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal 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.
- On today's call we will be joined by DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie and Vermont League of Cities and Towns Executive Director Ted Brady and Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn. 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.
- A reminder to folks 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.

AGENDA:

- I. Intro/call format
- II. COVID-19/VDH overview
- III. SEOC overview/VEM comments
- IV. 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**
 - As of January 27, 2022, the total case count is 102,153 total cases.
 - As of Monday, the seven-day average was 1,202 cases per day (10.8% 7-day average).
 - Over the last seven days, case counts have decreased 26%.
 - Over the last fourteen days, case counts have decreased 32%.
 - Regionally there is optimism that we are passing the peak of new omicron cases based on observations in neighboring states where case counts are also declining.
 - Current fatalities are at 529, which represents 0.5% of all cases.
 - Analysis of deaths reveal that the most recent deaths were predominantly from individuals infected with the Delta variant and not the Omicron variant.
 - More COVID-19 statistics are available on the [Department of Health's website](#).
- **Update on outbreaks and situations**
 - The healthcare system is highly stressed with hospitalization figures that are still very high--although perhaps a plateauing over the past seven days. The HOC and SEOC are monitoring staffing and resource needs. Some relief has been obtained through contract staffing, FEMA mission assignments, and the use of VTNG personnel.
- **Testing capacity updates**
 - There has been a significant increase in PCR testing and testing locations as the Omicron surge hit.
 - Vermont has shift to point of care testing, and take-home testing has begun, primarily in schools with a transition from "test to stay" to "test at home".
 - Schools are being provided a steady supply of take-home tests, which has increased roughly 10% in the last week.
 - In addition to schools, work to ensure other vulnerable populations have access to take home tests is ongoing.
 - Supply chain shortages have resulted in limited supply at times, and as supply chains improve, we will continue our expansion.

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- If you do not have access to take home tests, PCR testing is available with fairly rapid turnaround.
 - **Vaccination updates**
 - Vaccination and boosting are a very important element of the response. Those who are unvaccinated are much more likely to contract COVID-19.
 - Unvaccinated individuals are hospitalized at much higher rates than vaccinated individuals, and unvaccinated individuals become critical care patients at an overwhelmingly higher rate than vaccinated individuals.
 - Vaccine appointments can be made by visiting the [Vermont Department of Health website](#) or by calling (855) 722-7878.
 - More COVID-19 vaccination statistics are available on the [Department of Health's website](#).
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III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: VEM Director Erica Bornemann

- **SEOC status:** The SEOC remains partially 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.
- **SEOC Partners and Main Objectives of this Activation:** Last week we went over the SEOC partners and main objectives. Please visit last week's notes for details.
 - Emphasis and priority continue to be providing support to hospitals.
 - Working with the National Guard for deployment of personnel to assist hospitals. We are very appreciative of the National Guard for providing support to assist hospitals as the hospitals address the Omicron surge.
- **PPE/Mask Updates:** 100,000 KN95s masks have been purchased for school distribution. Masks will be distributed over the next two weeks. The masks will primarily be for adults and older children. AOE is encouraging schools to utilize their avenues to purchase masks as necessary. Masks are not resource constrained.
 - VEM recently distributed an email to all local emergency management directors and the top-3 contacts on LEMPs with instructions for ordering procedural masks.
- **Upcoming learning event:** Vermont Emergency Management and its partners will host Vermont's annual Spring Flood Seminars this coming week. These events are an opportunity for emergency managers and community leaders to hear the latest forecast for spring flooding and ice jams, learn more about emergency response assistance available from state agencies, emergency planning, disaster recovery, hazard mitigation opportunities, and other topics. No registration is necessary, and all are welcome to attend the Spring Flood Seminars, especially community leaders who may be involved in disaster response or recovery. These virtual Spring Flood Seminars will be held live through Microsoft Teams. Details can be seen in the VEM newsletter <https://vem.vermont.gov/sites/demhs/files/documents/January%20%2722%20Newsletter.pdf> Scheduled speakers will each present on January 31st, February 1st, and February 3rd. Please email DPS.EMHSTraining@vermont.gov for additional information.
- **Homeland Security Grants:** VEM is accepting applications for the Homeland Security Grant Program, Nonprofit Security Grant Program, and Operation Stone Garden through March 4, 2022. These are the premier forward-facing grant programs and hopefully eligible recipients take advantage of these.
 - <https://hsu.vermont.gov/homeland-security-unit/funding-opportunities>
 - <https://vem.vermont.gov/contact-us/newsletter/links>

IV. Updates on Town Meeting and Elections during the Pandemic: Vermont League of Cities and Towns Executive Director Ted Brady and Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn.

- **Town Meetings, Select Board Meetings, City Council Meetings, and Trustee Meetings:** Legislature and the Governor have provided municipalities with pandemic-related flexibility this year.
 - Act 77 allows municipalities to postpone this year's town meeting to a later date or to otherwise hold the meeting by Australian ballot, even if they normally perform a floor vote. The local legislative body needs to vote to enact this flexibility. Details are available at the links below.
 - Act 78 allows municipalities to conduct fully remote meetings through January 2023. This optionality applies to all public bodies. Along with this permissiveness, there are other housekeeping changes such as where to post agendas and minutes. Details are available at the links below.
 - Both acts are permissive, not restrictive. Municipalities are permitted to utilize these provisions but are not required to do so. Details are available in the links below.
 - **Guidance for Town Meeting and elections:**
 - VLCT is hosting the second in a multiple part town meeting tune-up on February 18.:
 - <https://www.vlct.org/event/town-meeting-tune>
 - Remote Meetings Toolkits:
 - <https://www.vlct.org/resource/remote-only-public-meetings-2022-toolkit>
 - <https://www.vlct.org/resource/remote-informational-hearing-2022-toolkit>
 - Open Meeting Law FAQs: <https://www.vlct.org/open-meeting-law-2022-covid-19-faqs>
 - **American Rescue Plan Act:** Most notable update is the ability to take up to \$10 million dollars as lost revenue.
 - If you are trying to figure out how to spend your ARPA money and you are trying to calculate your lost revenue, you no longer need to do that.
 - Since the ceiling is \$10 million dollars as lost revenue, every town in Vermont except Burlington can take all their ARPA money as lost revenue if they choose to. It gives you new flexibilities you did not have before that final rule.
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V. Questions from Call Participants

- **My town has employees that will not get vaccinated. Where can we get tests?** Due to overarching supply chain constraints, the SOV does not have rapid tests available broadly to address continuity of operations. We do recommend utilizing retailers like Amazon, CVS, Walgreens, or any of the other pharmacy retailers with supply. It probably will take a couple of weeks for them to get to you, but it is advisable to have a cache of rapid test on hand to ensure that you have the ability to maintain continuity of operations and rule out COVID 19 infections. It is a FEMA reimbursable cost. Note that the SOV is working towards establishing statewide commodities contracts. We do expect those will be up and active in the next one to two weeks. So that will be something that folks can purchase off of at the municipal level, which is really good news.
- **I am concerned that there are folks out there that have no idea what to do if they test positive with a home antigen test they may have purchased on line. They may call their PCP and are told they don't need a confirmatory test and to just monitor for symptoms. Even worse, they have no idea to report their positive**

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test to VDH or to try to do their own contact tracing. Is there a way to do some widespread PSAs explaining what someone should do if they test positive? We can certainly make that suggestion re a PSA up to our communications team. We agree that it is a challenge when people use take home tests, not only retrieving data but also making sure they follow through with the right procedures. There is a lot of information on the health department website [links below] around what to do if you test positive with a rapid test. There is a public inquiry line [numbers and hours below] that the health department has for folks that have questions can call. So even if they do not have internet access, there is a public inquiry line.

- <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/testing>
- <https://www.healthvermont.gov/about/contact>
- For testing and vaccine registration, call 855-722-7878. Calls are answered Mon. - Fri. 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Sat. and Sun. 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
- For other COVID-19 questions, call 833-722-0860. Calls are answered Mon.- Fri. 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
- Report testing results here: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6507748/Vermont-COVID-19-Self-Test-Result-Reporting-Form>

- **Do we have any information on the number of folks that have contracted COVID more than once?** We do not have exact numbers on this. We will ask our epidemiology department to discuss it and we can try to follow up for our next meeting with a little bit more information.
- **If a select board has an in-person meeting or a remote meeting, where do we post the notice and agenda?** In this circumstance, it is not about whether you are meeting in person or if your meeting is remote, it's about how you choose to notice that meeting and post the agenda. Act 78 gives you permission to change the way you notice meetings, whether they are in-person or remote. And that change is to allow you to post it in two places electronically instead of the normally required two places physically. If you opt to post it in two places electronically, and to send a copy to the local newspaper. The newspaper does not need to publish it, but they need to get a copy of it. In this circumstance, whether the meeting is in-person or remote has no bearing. It is about how you choose to post it. If you choose to follow the original open meeting law that says you are going to post it in two physical locations, you do not need to do anything differently. But if you choose to take advantage of posting your meeting electronically in two places, that's when the new law requiring you to also send a copy to your newspaper would come into effect. How you have your meeting is not what determines if you must send it to the newspaper. How you post your meeting is what determines whether you need to send it to the newspaper.