

**Newburyport Board of Health Meeting
March 19, 2020**

Date of Approval: May 7, 2020

Attendees

Dr. Robin Blair, Chairman of the Board
Dr. Sam Merabi, Board Member
Dr. Rob Slocum, Board Member
Frank Giacalone, Health Director
Molly Ettenborough, Energy & Sustainability Coordinator
Dr. Joseph Gross, Guest Speaker
Patricia McAlarney, Note Taker

Call to Order: Dr. Blair called the meeting called to order at 7:07 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: Motion to approve the minutes of the Board of Health meeting of January 16, 2020 was made by Dr. Merabi; seconded by Dr. Slocum. Votes to approve: 3 ; votes opposed - none. Minutes of the January 16, 2020 meeting were approved as submitted.

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Director Giacalone noted that City Hall is currently closed to the public; however, the Health Department remains operational during regular business hours and the public may call in to speak with department staff. The Mayor has closed the playgrounds and skate board park to encourage youth (and adults) to stay at home to reduce spread of virus. The Senior Center is still providing Meals on Wheels and is continuing the Tax Help for Seniors' Program. As of March 23, child care centers will have to close unless they have been approved by the state to offer child care services for first responders (only.) Meals-to-go are now available for pick up by families of any students that qualify to receive them. The meals may be picked up at the Nock School Monday and Thursdays from 10 am – Noon; and beginning next Thursday, Our Neighbor's Table will be offering fresh produce as well. The City Building Department has suspended issuing Building Permits for the time being.

Director Giacalone advised the Board that the Health Department has received many calls from residents that want to be tested for COVID-19; however, there are guidelines provided by the CDC that determine whether someone qualifies for testing. As more tests become available, it is expected that the number of positive cases will increase. To date, there have been no lab-tested positive cases of COVID-19; however, there have been quarantines issued to Newburyport residents that have recently returned from trips to other countries. The Health Department also received notifications about Newburyport residents who are direct contacts of people who have tested positive but reside in other communities. Director Giacalone noted that gatherings of more than 25 people are currently not allowed; and a strong recommendation has been made that the restriction be strengthened to disallow congregation of groups greater than 10 people. Grocery stores and pharmacies remain open for business; restaurants are allowed to sell products for take-out only (no on-site consumption of food is allowed.) Dr. Merabi noted that the Mass Dental Society issued a strong recommendation that all dental offices be closed until April 6 (except for emergencies.)

The Board welcomed Dr. Joseph Gross, a specialist in infectious diseases, who provided information and suggestions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Gross advised that are a number of variables that will affect the transmissibility of COVID-19; and the number of people congregating at a time is one variable

that is receiving lots of focus. Dr. Gross stated that there needs to be a balance between being careful versus being overly aggressive. He explained that in his own practice he has seen a strong push to institute telemedicine. When asked about issuance of quarantines, Dr. Gross recommended that we issue quarantines only for direct contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases (i.e. not for “the contacts of a contact”.) This strategy aligns with the recommendation by the CDC. Dr. Gross explained that testing for COVID-19 is a fundamental tool that is missing and if (or when) widespread testing is implemented our response to this pandemic would change dramatically. Dr. Gross will provide the Board with links to excellent guidance documents that have been developed by the Washington State Department of Health and the University of Washington that aid in determining when individuals may be considered non-infectious and would qualify to be released from isolation and/or quarantine. Dr. Merabi noted that COVID-19 is especially challenging because the virus may be shed when a patient has few or no symptoms; this makes it difficult to determine when a person is no longer contagious. Dr. Gross noted that it has not yet been determined whether the virus can be transmitted by asymptomatic individuals. Dr. Slocum further noted that there has been speculation that the virus may aerosolize during testing; his practice would rather not be testing for coronavirus in their office, and instead have individuals be tested at one of the drive-through test sites where healthcare workers have the proper protective equipment.

Dr. Merabi questioned at what point the state’s hospitals would become overwhelmed if we were to experience a situation similar to Italy’s whereby a large number of seriously ill patients required ventilators. Dr. Gross stated that he believes that, overall, he is in agreement with the measures currently set in place by the state of Massachusetts. Based on the situation in Italy whereby ethics committees are being assembled to determine how to allocate available respirators (for example), he believes that, within reason, we need to be as aggressive as possible in our prevention strategies and hopes that widespread testing will become available soon. Social distancing is important in containing the spread.

The Board discussed whether warmer weather will bring about an abatement of the virus, however, Dr. Gross and Board Members agreed that there is currently no scientific data to determine whether this is the case. Dr. Gross also addressed the issue of dose-related-to severity-of illness but explained that it is not currently clear why some people get considerably more sick than others – it could be the infectious dose to which an individual is exposed, or for some reason the virus attacks an individual’s lungs.

Dr. Gross explained that several treatment options for COVID-19 are being tested, specifically hydroxychloroquine and Remdesivir, but so far no treatment option has been found to be profoundly effective. The Board discussed the World Health Organization’s retraction of their statement discouraging the use of ibuprofen for individuals diagnosed with COVID-19.

Director Giacalone confirmed that the Board agreed with the Mayor’s decision to close the city parks. He also informed the Board that first responders (Police Marshall and Fire Chief) will be informed of the addresses where a confirmed COVID-19 resides. This release of information has been approved under HIPPA because of the COVID-19 State of Emergency. Director Giacalone also informed that Board that the Health Department is posting COVID-19 information on the City’s website as it becomes available.

Motion to adjourn made by Dr. Blair; seconded by Dr. Slocum. Meeting adjourned at 8:08 pm.