

Newburyport Board of Health Meeting
January 7, 2021

Date of Approval: 1/21/2021

Attendees

Dr. Robin Blair, Chairman
Dr. Sam Merabi, Board Member
Dr. Robert Slocum, Board Member
Frank Giacalone, Health Director
Patricia McAlarney, Note Taker

Call to Order: called meeting called to order at 7:20 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: Motion to approve the Minutes of the Board of Health Meeting from December 17, 2020 was made by Dr. Merabi; seconded by Dr. Slocum. Votes to approve - 3; votes to oppose - 0. Minutes were approved as submitted.

Director Giacalone informed the Board that the State announced on January 4 that local Boards of Health may begin vaccinating First Responders as of January 11. Since the State required that a minimum of 200 vaccines be ordered for administration to First Responders, Newburyport has partnered with seven other communities to host Regional First Responder Clinics. The Clinics are tentatively scheduled to be held at the Newburyport Senior Center on January 14 and 16, with a staff training and vaccination clinic for clinic staff (only) on January 12.

Newburyport received approval last night as an Administrator of the PrepMod software that has been provided by the State for local Boards of Health to manage the vaccine administration process. PrepMod provides end-user capability that allows patients to enter their medical and insurance information, and confirm their consent for vaccination as well as schedule their vaccine appointment directly into the system. PrepMod will also track vaccine inventory, submit vaccine information directly to the MIIS (Mass Immunization Information System), and refer all vaccine claims directly to Commonwealth Medicine to arrange for reimbursement to Health Departments from private insurers, Medicare and Mass Health for the cost of vaccine administration.

Director Giacalone explained that at this time it is estimated that Newburyport has 47 combined Fire and Police personnel, and an additional five staff members from the Harbormaster Department who have expressed interest in receiving the vaccine. Final numbers of vaccines to be administered will not be known until PrepMod has been made available to all of the communities. Dr. Merabi suggested that the department initiate an education campaign for the first responders to provide guidance as to the benefits of vaccination since there seems to be an abundance of misinformation about the vaccine circulating in the general public. Dr. Merabi suggested projects aimed at reducing people's concerns about receiving the vaccine may incentivize those who are reluctant to be vaccinated. Some suggestions for motivational projects included photos posted on social media of local citizens (first responders) receiving their vaccines, and newspaper articles and photos from the vaccine clinics.

Director Giacalone explained that the vaccine supply recently received is intended for 'first round' doses for first responders and is not to be saved to provide the second dose for the first responders. If the department has an excess of doses, it is acceptable for the department to transfer doses to another approved vaccine provider (such as Anna Jaques Hospital.)

Maintaining an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPEs), especially gloves, continues to be a concern. Dr. Merabi suggested that the department request that vaccine recipients, such as dentist and healthcare offices, first responder departments, etc., be asked to provide donations of gloves and other needed PPEs when they come for their vaccinations.

Director Giacalone stated that the public schools are still considering implementing pool testing for their staff and students that would be conducted by Atlantic/Cataldo Ambulance.

COVID Risk Level: Director Giacalone informed the Board that Newburyport's risk level for COVID-19 has never officially reached the High Risk Level since that designation requires that a community remain the 'red risk category' for a period of three weeks (Newburyport was only designated as 'red' for two weeks.) Newburyport is currently in the "Yellow" Moderate Risk Category at 4.5 percent positivity.

General Department Update:

- To assist with the added workload created by the pandemic and upcoming vaccination clinics, the Department has hired two temporary part-time office staff who collectively work 15 hours per week, as well as two Contact Tracers who were hired previously to conduct tracing for Newburyport COVID cases that are not referred to the Community Tracing Collaborative (CTC.)
- Animal Control – Animal Control Officer, Kayla Provencher, was notified of an abandoned llama found on Hale Street this past week. Despite widespread media coverage no owner has come forward to claim the llama who is currently being fostered at a farm in New Hampshire until the required custody period for strays has expired.

Dr. Slocum noted that there has been concern about coyotes in residential areas. Director Giacalone explained that residents are encouraged to not leave small pets outside unattended, and if a coyote is encountered to use the 'act large and loud' strategy to frighten the coyotes away.

- Dr. Blair relayed a compliment paid to Director Giacalone from the owner of Loretta stating that Director Giacalone consistently provides excellent guidance and advice in an easily approachable manner.
- Chipotle restaurant opened recently and has proved to be extremely popular. Director Giacalone followed up on a complaint about lack of social distancing that resulted in the manager decreasing the number of customers allowed inside at any time in order to comply with COVID occupancy restrictions.

Next Board of Health Meeting will be held remotely on January 21 at 7:00 pm.

Meeting adjourned – 8:22 pm