



**CITY OF NEWBURYPORT
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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**Newburyport Board of Health
December 09, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

In Attendance:

Board of Health Members	Dr. Robin Blair, Chair Dr. Robert Slocum Dr. Sam Merabi
Health Department Staff	Frank Giacalone, Director of Public Health Michael Lawler, Office Manager
Public Comment	None

I. Call to Order – Board Chair/Members

Dr. Robin Blair called the meeting to order at 7:07 pm.

II. Approval of Minutes– Board Chair/Members

Dr. Sam Merabi made a motion to approve the minutes from the 11/4/21 meeting. Dr. Robert Slocum seconded the motion. The minutes were approved 3-0.

III. COVID-19 Updates – Frank Giacalone & Michael Lawler

November 2021:

188 total cases for the month (*bringing total pandemic cases to 1,812*)

6 new deaths (*bringing total pandemic deaths to 50*)

December 2021 (12/1/21 – 12/9/21):

66 cases month-to-date (*bringing total pandemic cases to 1,878*)

1 additional death (*bringing total pandemic deaths to 51*)

14-day Percent Positivity Rates:

NEWBURYPORT	4.96%
STATEWIDE	4.46%
SALISBURY	10.75%
AMESBURY	6.75%
WEST NEWBURY	7.73%

NEWBURY	6.69%
ROWLEY	8.82%

Newburyport's percent positivity rate is lower than many surrounding municipalities, but it is still above the statewide average.

One big challenge that we face is that the states Community Tracing Collaborative has closed as of November 30, 2021, meaning that we can no longer send cases to them. They will continue to work throughout the month of December to follow up on cases they had gotten prior to the November 30th closure. Funding from FEMA does not cover contact tracing so we are trying our best to get grants/other funding sources so we can keep our contact tracers on.

The state shifted guidance on contact tracing since they closed the collaborative. They are basically asking us to prioritize cases based on test date (newest are highest priority, older tests are lowest priority) and follow up on those ones, but not to necessarily follow up on all cases that come in. We see this as a bad thing and think it will lead to an increase in cases, especially throughout the holidays. In addition to the prioritization, state guidance is now to only make one initial call instead of doing multiple calls to one case. We are also supposed to be asking the positive case to notify their contacts instead of us doing so, unless the positive case is for some reason unable to do it themselves. If someone does not answer the phone, the guidance is to leave a detailed message with a callback number, advice on notifying close contacts, and isolation/quarantine requirements. Also, if there are multiple cases in one household, it is fine to call and just talk to one "responsible adult" for the entire household.

Newburyport has a vaccination rate of 90% for people with at least one dose and the breakdown of that is 79% fully vaccinated and 11% partially vaccinated. For ages 5-11, 65% with at least one dose and 35% are fully vaccinated. Ages 50-75+ are over 95% which is really good.

We did have one interesting cluster – the girls basketball team. There was a positive case so the nursing team at the school quarantined the entire team. After this, angry calls started coming in from family members questioning what a close contact is and why did the entire team get deemed close contacts. Very similar to what happened last year around this time with the hockey team.

a. Testing

We had a testing clinic the day before Thanksgiving and we did just under 200 tests, only two of which were positive. We have also use our state-supplied kits to test employees (ex. DPS when it had positive cases). Running the tests is very low touch – we swab the person outside, bring the sample inside and run the test which takes about 15 minutes, then once we read the result and enter it into our software it automatically texts the person their result so we do not have to call and it automatically reports the test right to the state.

Our current test supply is 119 tests and we are ordering more in advance of doing another testing event before Christmas. That testing event will be taking place on December 23, 2021 at the Hope Community Church and we will be doing about 200 tests.

With the increase in cases as well as being between the holidays, we are hearing that it is extremely hard to find testing. Stores, like CVS and Walgreens, are running out of the at-home \$25 tests and we are getting calls that walk-in clinics, like Convenient MD, are turning people away because they are running out of testing appointments for the day.

b. Booster Vaccines

We will be hosting vaccination clinics for the *Moderna booster only* over the next two weeks. Weekday clinics will be Monday, December 13th – Thursday, December 16th and Monday, December 20th right in the Health Department at City Hall and we will host a Saturday clinic on December 18th at the Senior Center.

Clinics are filling up fast – we are fully booked for most of the weekday clinics and the Saturday clinics is now starting to get booked as well.

Lots of people in the community are having trouble getting appointment so we hope this helps to alleviate some of that demand.

c. Funds/Grants

Applied for a grant for contact tracing with Salisbury, Newbury, and Rowley this past Friday (December 3, 2021). Hoping to hear back mid-month on if we got it or not.

The plan that we submitted was structured so that each day we would have one tracing lead and three contact tracers working. The role of the tracing lead would be to gather a list of the positive cases from each of the communities then assign them to contact tracers. The contact tracers (and the tracing lead) would then do all of their calls and documentation.

IV. General Department Update

New Mayor-elect Sean Reardon asked each department head to come up with a summary of what our challenges are, what is our staffing like, etc. A lot of the information came right from our budget and our final submission was around 6 pages. His transition team is coming around to meet with each department head and today we had Frank Cousins and Gary Caldewood came to our department to meet. Conveyed our need for additional staffing in the future and our potential need for funding for vaccination clinics, testing clinics, and contact tracing.

V. Other Matters

None at this time.

VI. Next Meeting – *Board Chair/Members*

The next meeting will be on Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 7:00 pm.

VII. Adjourn – *Board Chair/Members*

Motion to adjourn by Dr. Sam Merabi. Seconded by Dr. Robert Slocum.

Meeting adjourned at 7:37pm.