

Newburyport Board of Health Meeting
February 11, 2021

Date of Approval: 2/25/2021

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: Meeting called to order at 7:06 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: Motion to approve the Minutes of the Board of Health Meeting from January 21, 2021 was made by Dr. Sam Merabi; seconded by Dr. Rob Slocum. Votes to approve - 3; votes to oppose - 0. Minutes were approved as submitted.

First Responder Clinic: Director Giacalone -

The State provided doses for 800 First Responders for the Regional Clinic(s) that were held in Newburyport. Only 480 First Responders from the eight communities involved in the clinic opted to receive the vaccine. The remaining 320 doses were administered at a Clinic on February 6 to other Phase I-eligible individuals and to an additional 15 individuals ages 75 and over. At the current time all of the initial 800 doses have been administered and the second doses will be administered at Clinics to be held on February 13, February 18 and March 6. Because less than 85% of the initial 800 doses had been administered prior to February 6, the State would not supply our Regional Clinics with any additional (first dose) vaccine. The Regional group will continue to apply for Moderna vaccine and has also submitted a request for 1,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine. No further clinics will be scheduled until we have received a vaccine shipment.

The Newburyport Senior and Low Income Housing Authority was recently notified by the State that they may partner with the local Health Department to secure vaccine and offer vaccinations to the, approximate, 200 participants in their programs. Director Giacalone stated that he has received multiple calls from Councilors advocating for these residents to be vaccinated as soon as possible. Because the State will provide a separate supply of vaccine specifically earmarked for Newburyport's residents of senior and low income housing, Director Giacalone explained that the Department is considering splintering off from the larger regional group for the purpose of vaccinating this population. The Public Health Nurse, Pam Palombo, is investigating whether a third party may be contracted to administer the vaccines to the Senior and Low Income Housing participants.

Director Giacalone informed the Board that the State is now diverting vaccine doses from local Health Departments to the larger vaccine sites and to retail pharmacies. Recently a pharmacist from Ipswich was able to secure 500 doses that were utilized to vaccinate residents in Salisbury and Amesbury.

The Regional group which includes Newburyport and eight other communities will be holding second dose clinics at the Page School in West Newbury. While the venue is larger than the Newburyport Senior Center, Director Giacalone, explained that in order to accommodate a socially distanced monitoring period it may be necessary to have two waiting areas; one of which requires patients to walk outside from the vaccination area to the waiting area. Other possible vaccination venues are also being considered for future larger clinics.

Director Giacalone informed the Board that he has advised the Health Department Staff that because of the current workload he feels that the Department does not have the capacity to provide individual assistance to residents that are having difficulty securing appointments online for their vaccination; he recommends that these individuals be provided with the State 2-1-1 phone number for assistance. The Department has successfully enlisted the help of two volunteers that have been helpful in scheduling appointments for seniors who do not have computer access.

Convenient MD reached out to the Health Department and offered to vaccinate groups of patients who are directed to them by the Health Department. The Department was able to secure vaccinations for 30 residents this past week. The other communities in the regional group will also be allowed to direct residents to Convenient MD while the (limited) vaccine supply lasts.

The Health Department is frustrated with the lack of vaccine availability and receives numerous calls daily inquiring about how to obtain vaccines. The Department is also receiving complaints from residents that question why the Senior Center is being utilized by a private enterprise (Anna Jaques Hospital, Beth Israel and Lahey Clinic) to provide vaccinations only to their patients.

Newburyport's COVID risk level has declined in both Average Daily Incidence (from 20.5 to 18.9) and in the Percent Positivity Rate, which has dropped from 2.31 to 1.93. If the Average Daily Incidence Rate drops below 10, the City may revert to a Green / Low Risk Category.

The Board suggested that the Health Department website be updated to inform residents that due to restricted supply of vaccine, vaccination clinics are not currently being offered. It was also recommended that a link directly to the State Immunization Website be included to provide residents with easier access to appointments.

General Department Update:

- Changing Tides has received City approval for, and is now operating, a food truck from which they sell coffee, muffins and donuts throughout the City (except in the downtown overlay district.)
- The Health Department has received a \$39,000 grant through Emergency Preparedness to assist in covering expenses associated with staffing at vaccine clinics, etc.

Next Board of Health Meeting will be held remotely on February 25th at 7:00 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.