

**Board of Health
Meeting Minutes
January 11, 2023**

Present:

Susan Schwartz, Chair
Maureen Richichi, Vice Chair
Bea Brunkhorst
Ann Kiessling (late arrival 7:27pm))

Staff Present:

Heidi Porter, Director of Health and
Human Services
Katharine Dagle, Assistant Health Director
Julie Genova, Public Health Nurse
Danielle Williams, Interim Recording Secretary

Others Present (In-person or by Zoom):

Mike Rosenburg, Bedford Citizen
Bedford TV
Robert Kalantari
Katie Guerino

Doug Horton
Shawn Kennery
Joe Piantedosi

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. Ms. Schwartz chaired the meeting.

BOH Minutes - Review and Vote

The meeting minutes from December 7th, 2022 were reviewed and amended as requested. Ms. Richichi moved to approve the minutes as amended; Dr. Brunkhorst seconded the motion. A vote of 3-0-0 approved the meeting minutes from December 7th, 2022.

Public Comment

Ms. Schwartz opened the meeting to any public comments.

Mr. Robert Kalantari, 8 Donovan Drive, has submitted an e-mail to Ms. Porter to be shared with the BOH members and which he read aloud. Mr. Kalantari asked the BOH members for a panel discussion regarding the lessons learned from COVID-19. He notes that there is confusion as to whether the vaccines work; how many shots are needed; why are people still getting sick after getting vaccinated; and was masking effective. He continued that he is an engineer and knows all about PPE and paper masks don't provide protection and do provide a false sense of security.

Mr. Joe Piantedosi, 14 Putnam Drive, strongly supports the suggestions and recommendations that Mr. Kalantari made. He notes that he knows a lot of people who received the vaccinations, wore masks and did all the things that were recommended. He stated many of them still got COVID-19 and at least 7 people he knows did end up passing way. He is also concerned about the new rates of COVID that are coming out and if the vaccines are causing other issues. He hopes the BOH will look at what works and what doesn't and come up with new measures. Mr. Piantedosi is disappointed that the BOH focus is on gun violence prevention and should be on COVID and mosquito borne diseases.

As there were no further public comments, Ms. Schwartz closed the public comment portion of the meeting.

COVID-19 Response – Data Evaluation, Mitigation Review and BOH Discussion

Ms. Porter reviewed the COVID-19 data and noted a slight uptick in cases. MAVEN (state system) is only tracking the cases that are laboratory confirmed. School data seems to be steady. Regional waste water data does confirm elevated virus load. Flu and RSV cases have stabilized. A new variant has emerged and is most prevalent in the region. Data is still showing that vaccination is a great way to prevent severe illness and hospitalization. Some communities have implemented mask mandates in schools however the Bedford school data and the MAVEN data do not indicate that a consideration for a mask mandate is warranted in Bedford. She will continue to monitor and watch the data. Booster vaccinations rates are still low but recommendation is to be up to date with vaccinations, including a bivalent booster shot.

Ms. Richichi noted that she gets a newsletter called ‘Your Local Epidemiologist’ by Katelyn Jetelina and the latest one talks about a study that examined prison systems to assess transmission networks. COVID-19 vaccinations reduced infectiousness by 22% and prior infection reduced infectiousness by 23%. Hybrid immunity reduced infectiousness by 40%. The least infectious cases were those who had been recently vaccinated. This matters because vaccines still help in ways other than preventing severe disease, on an individual level.

Ms. Schwartz also added that you should reach out to your personal physician to see what is best plan for you.

Dr. Brunkhorst noted there is a great study from the CDC on death rates from April 2022 through September 2022. The graph shows death rate is highest for people that didn’t get the vaccine at all; people with primary vaccination and 1 booster has the next highest death rate, followed by people with primary vaccination only and people with primary vaccination and 2 boosters had the lowest death rate.

Ms. Richichi indicated that the public needs to understand that the research is still on-going. Another thing that Katelyn Jetelina reported on was that the Moderna Bivalent vaccine does better for folks over 50 as it produces a stronger t-cell response.

Ms. Porter stated that the Health Department and BOH continue to promote all of the recommended mitigation strategies.

Ms. Schwartz added that everyone was waiting for the vaccine and expected that the vaccine would prevent people from getting sick although it does reduce hospitalizations and deaths.

Dr. Brunkhorst remarked that the CDC still recommends that if you are exposed, test yourself for 5 days and wear a mask for 10 days.

Ms. Porter added that in that same newsletter Ms. Richichi is referencing the report about the waste water on planes in Malaysia and after testing the waste water from 29 planes, 28 of them (96%) were reported to contain COVID-19, so people are traveling with it.

Ms. Schwartz noted that the BOH will continue to monitor the data. She stated that message the Health Department released that day about COVID-19 cases on the rise was spot on.

Ms. Porter added that, as necessary, the high COVID-19 Community Level signage will get reposted as a reminder to folks.

Dr. Brunkhorst asked if the masking in Boston was mandated.

Ms. Porter relayed that it is not a mandate but a recommendation and that this was in response to uptick in waste water and from a substitute teacher shortage among the Boston schools.

Ms. Genova added that the mask mandates that were in place were only for two weeks and were more of a preemptive strike following the school break and because schools are not doing pool testing.

Ms. Porter stated that the town has received another supply of the home testing kits that are available for pick up. The last lot of testing kits are about to expire but are still good. She read off Lot# 222CO20127 that do expire on 1/23/23. Reminds folks to check the lot numbers to confirm extended expiration date.

Ms. Dagle noted that the locations for test kit pick up are at Town Manager's Office, Library, Council on Aging and the Health Department.

Ms. Richichi stated that a study from the New England Journal of Medicine compared schools in MA that kept the mask mandate to schools that removed it after the statewide policy was rescinded and schools that lifted the masking had an additional 44.9 COVID-19 cases per 1000 students and staff.

Ms. Genova noted that there was an uptick in COVID cases in Bedford after Thanksgiving. There were 117 cases in December, 18 cases for January ending 1/6 and in the report that was run that day 36 cases were reported. These are MAVEN cases and do not reflect home testing. Schools are not getting slammed with cases as last year. XBB.15 is the new Omicron variant. People are getting this new variant however they are not getting severely sick. DPH and CDC indicate that the number one way to combat severe illness is to get vaccinated. Vaccination decreases the likelihood of you ending up in the hospital. The messaging is still: if you are sick, stay home.

Ms. Schwartz asked about whether there are test kits for all three predominant respiratory viruses (COVID-19, Flu and RSV).

Ms. Genova noted that there is but it is a lab test. While you collect the sample at home, you would have to send it out to a lab for analysis. Because of the longer turn around time, she doesn't see people using these tests much. She also adds that providers do not want people to go to CVS and take a strep test because they want that medical supervision and assessment to happen.

Dr. Kiessling stated that MA is one of 9 states that still have this rule (requiring a physician order for a test).

Reports – BOH Liaisons and HD Staff

Ms. Dagle stated that she attended the annual animal inspector meeting hosted by Mass Dept of Agricultural Resources (MDAR). She usually attends this meeting before her animal inspections.

Some of the topics included animal diseases, review of the state barn book inspectional process, rabies quarantine and testing protocols, animal identification and the MA animal resources. A total of 17 animal inspections were done in Bedford for the barn book, which was sent back to the state. The barn book is done to assist MDAR with emergency preparedness and responses related to animal health. Ms. Dagle added that the inspections include Bedford Animal permittees as well as barns. The number has been steady over the past few years. Outreach articles submitted to the media that related to respiratory illness prevention and holiday food safety and to Council on Aging (COA) for this month related to Winter Weather Preparedness. Ms. Dagle also attended a meeting with Hanscom AFB Water Quality Department to review the notification process for Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSO) and the requirements of 314 CMR 16.00 that went into effect in July. DPW is responsible for SSO however the Health Department has some responsibilities if the overflows were to impact recreational water bodies.

Dr. Kiessling asked what the total livestock number was.

Ms. Dagle replied that the number would be around 50-80 range and most animals are present on farms.

Ms. Genova reported that she has done several Blood Pressure (BP) clinics, attended a Regional Grant Nurse meeting which are on-going via ZOOM, did a First Aid presentation to the Boy Scouts (3rd Graders) achieving first aid badges. A public health nurse chapter meeting included a presentation by an audiologist, Dr. Megan Ford, who discussed the anatomy and physiology of hearing loss and also reviewed some of the big risk factors of seniors that relates to falls, dementia, depression and isolation. FDA has approved over the counter (OTC) hearing aids. The hearing aids are generic and are not fitted and just provides amplification. She held a COVID-19/Flu clinic on 12/12 and attended the December Bedford At-Risk meeting. Ms. Genova relays that the news from the World Health Organization (WHO) is that the Ebola outbreak is over. It has been 42 days since the last case was reported and that is twice the amount of time of 21-day incubation period. Returning travelers from Uganda no longer need to be assessed.

Dr. Kiessling asked if the death rate was published.

Ms. Genova stated that she does not know the death rate however it is probably published somewhere. She noted that this outbreak was not as hard hitting as the outbreak in the past. Ms. Genova added that the influenza numbers are going down.

Ms. Porter reported that in the month of December, the social service team did see a huge uptick in housing and eviction issues which required a multi-disciplined responses with Police, Fire, Health and YFS involved. The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) indicated that Bedford social service team does a great job with enrolling residents in signing folks up Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Bedford has a 70% approval rate; however SNAP benefits are decreasing in March. An invitation for a 3-year grant from Cummings Foundation was received and completed to hopefully bring on another PT Assistant for the Food Bank. She stated that the COA is looking to bring back the lunches for our senior residents through Minuteman Senior Services. Lunches were transitioned to drive-through and/or pick up due to the pandemic. The next Dinner and Discussion is planned for February 16th at the First Church Congregational from 6p-8p. MetroWest OUT, a LGBTQ+ support organization will present. The town received an additional 3,600 at-home testing kits which are available to residents. The Tobacco Regulation is now before

the Town Council for review. Ms. Porter noted that there has been a big gap in the provision of services to individuals in a mental health crisis by the regional crisis provider. To address this gap the state established funding for Community Behavioral Health Centers (CBHC's). Advocates in Waltham received the contract for our region. Meetings will be had to share information and to learn how to get people referred there. Residents have had to go to the ER to get evaluation and have been there for hours only often to be sent home because they did not need to be admitted. Between the Town and the schools there is about 1 referral per month for ER visits. Advocates will be doing their own outreach and we need to see how they want us to spread the word.

Ms. Genova relayed some Ebola information. The recent Ebola outbreak was Uganda's first in a decade and its fifth outbreak overall for that kind of Ebola. In total, there were 164 cases, 55 confirmed deaths, 87 recovered patients. There were more than 4000 people who came into contact with confirmed cases, were followed up on and health monitored for 21 days. Overall the case fatality ratio was 47%. The last patient was released from care on 11/30/22 and that started the 42-day countdown.

Ms. Schwartz noted that she attended the COA Board meeting and they are looking at dementia friendly and age friendly activities. YFS Committee meets tomorrow.

Ms. Richichi has reached out to Ann Guay, School Liaison, to see if there was any update or movement on the school start times and hasn't heard back as of yet.

Open Discussion

Dr. Kiessling asked if the e-mail from Mr. Kalantari was talked about.

Ms. Schwartz answered that they did and he did speak during Public Comment.

Dr. Kiessling also asked if there are any plans for a COVID-19 review.

Dr. Brunkhorst noted that last year the state epidemiologist was going to do some kind of COVID response.

Ms. Porter noted that much of the discussion on the topic has shifted to the current status of the pandemic. She indicated that much of the focus has been on reviewing information that will help impact future decisions. The state or region currently has no plans to do a review but instead continues to keep an eye on the fact that we are at a high community transmission level and promote the mitigation strategies.

Ms. Richichi said that the BOH has a commitment to do a review however we are still currently in the pandemic.

Dr. Brunkhorst indicated that to get real numbers, you would have to look at it from the county and state so that we can learn from others as we are not on an island. We need to compare to other parts of the country and maybe get some professional advice.

Dr. Kiessling noted that the real problem were the schools and she reached out to one CDC scientist who said that the CDC didn't push six-foot distancing which is what shut the schools down. Dr.

Kiessling added that she sent the link to the CDC's page on ventilation. She added that a lot of the messaging that came from the CDC was mixed messaging and it was very confusing. She also added that if this happens again, we have to make sure that we don't shut down the schools.

Dr. Brunkhorst noted that there are a lot more tools now and that was a different time as we didn't understand the transmissivity. We have a lot more immunity now.

Ms. Richichi added that it wasn't just the advice of the CDC that was considered but other epidemiologists across the country and reputable public health experts like those at John Hopkins.

Dr. Kiessling stated that if we had followed the 2017 CDC guidelines it wouldn't have been so devastating. The CDC had put out guidelines for a respiratory virus outbreak based on past flu and SARS outbreaks and they were not followed during the recent pandemic. She said if you read them, they make a lot of sense. They show what things to do without shutting down society.

Ms. Richichi said that there are best practices available to support to our response in the future if this happens again. She pointed to communities like Southborough that immediately pulled in a task force that seemed to have a smoother flow of getting messaging out and this model could be a better way of how we get information out to the community.

Ms. Richichi spoke about the Gun Violence Prevention Campaign and that the endorsement request letters have gone out and we are getting good response. There are already 15 endorsements. Ms. Richichi also stated that this is an effective campaign that we are doing as this is an appropriate timely local response to a current public epidemic. The website will have the educational information and graphics.

Dr. Kiessling asked what the response would be if someone has called the Health office and said that their neighbor is crazy and thinks they have a gun. She asked what the response would be.

Ms. Porter said that the individual would be directed to the call the police. If there were any information that was able to be offered, like an address or a name, this would be relayed to the police.

Ms. Richichi moved to adjourn the meeting of January 11th, 2023. Dr. Brunkhorst seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote 4-0-0.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

BOH Draft Minutes – 12/7/22

COVID-19 Data – Last 2 Months

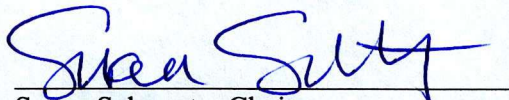
Director's Report

Assistant Health Director's Update

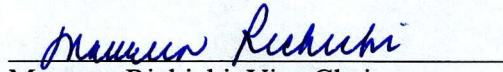
Public Health Nurse Update

Resident E-Mail – Robert Kalantari

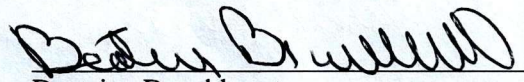
The next scheduled meeting of the Board of Health is February 6, 2023.



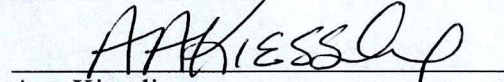
Susan Schwartz, Chair




Maureen Richichi, Vice Chair



Beatrice Brunkhorst



Ann Kiessling



Anita Raj