

Wellesley Board of Health  
Remote Meeting via Zoom  
Meeting Minutes  
January 13, 2022, 12:00 PM

Present:

Board:

Shepard Cohen, MPA, Chair  
Marcia Testa Simonson, MPH, PhD, Vice Chair  
Linda Oliver Grape, PA-C, MPH, Secretary

Staff:

Deadra Doku Gardner, Administrator  
Leonard Izzo, MS, RS, CHO, Director  
Cheryl Lefman, MA, Community Health Coordinator  
Ann Marie McCauley, RN, Public Health Nurse Supervisor  
Vivian Zeng, REHS, RS, CP-FS, Senior Environmental Health Specialist

In attendance:

Shira Doron, MD, resident  
Stephanie Hawkinson, Public Information Officer, Town of Wellesley  
Ashley Hulme, Director of Nursing, Wellesley Public Schools  
David Lussier, Superintendent, Wellesley Public Schools  
Catherine Mirick, School Committee, Wellesley Public Schools.  
Beth Sullivan Woods, Member, Select Board

1. Director's Report

Leonard Izzo reported that the Health Department has placed an order for test kits that are expected to arrive in the coming weeks. These kits will be first distributed to first responders and residents in need.

Mr. Izzo reported that a staff conference (zoom) was held earlier today to meet the two new epidemiologists hired for the NC8 regional collaborative. The epidemiologists will be working on data collection and interpretation. They will not be conducting contact tracing.

2. Covid-19

a) Wellesley Public Schools (WPS)

David Lussier reviewed the updated COVID-19 dashboard for the WPS. There have been 709 Covid cases in the district since the start of the school year, with 175 new cases since last Friday.

Dr. Lussier noted that even though the students and staff have been reported as positive, COVID symptoms are generally mild, and individuals are absent from school for relatively few days.

Dr. Lussier reviewed the new CDC quarantine and isolation guidance, noting that there is less time spent in quarantine. He said that staffing levels were difficult to maintain last week as multiple staff were out sick. Faculty and staff across the district are commended for filling in and assisting during the staffing shortage. There has been a significant improvement in both staff and student absences this week.

Dr. Lussier reported that the school district continues to provide Covid testing to students, however the pool testing takes a significant amount of time and energy to manage. Dr. Lussier cited as an example, that by the end of last week the administration still did not have sample results back from tests from the beginning of the week. Dr. Lussier noted that the administration is on the cusp of a new approach to testing.

Dr. Lussier reported that 26 million rapid test kits have been purchased by the government for schools however, there is still no information on the distribution time-line. WPS purchased a significant number of kits (15,000) for district use. They are expected to arrive in the next two weeks and once received, there will be weekly distribution for individuals to test at home. This plan will allow a more consistent level of testing throughout the WPS system. Dr. Lussier said the price for each test kit pallet is \$76,000.

At the last meeting, Dr. Lussier reported that 36,000 KN95 masks were delivered for use by faculty and staff from the state. It was expected to be a sufficient supply for 5 to 6 weeks. At today's meeting, Dr. Lussier reported that they are waiting to see if the state will replenish this inventory.

Dr. Lussier reported that the state has expanded the school mask mandate until end of February.

Dr. Lussier said the schools intend to conduct additional in-school vaccine clinics. He also noted that vaccination rates are not fully input into the systems from the last clinics, so a complete and accurate picture of vaccination rates cannot be provided at this time.

Marcia Testa Simonson and Linda Oliver Grape commended Dr. Lussier on his work and his report. Linda Oliver Grape inquired as to students and their mental health status during these stressful times. Dr. Lussier reported that there has not been a great deal of relief but there has been

progress on student absences and staff absences this week, compared to the previous week. He elaborated that there continues to be a great deal of concern in the community and anxiety among parents and students.

b) Community Cases

Ann Marie McCauley reported that the Wellesley positivity rate is at 13.7% rate with approximately 35 cases per day. There continues to be no pattern of infection – different age ranges, lots of children and many household infections. Ms. McCauley reported that she is not aware of anyone being hospitalized.

Shepard Cohen reported on the frequent news reports of the hospitals being full of COVID patients. Dr. Shira Doron explained that the hospitals are full, however the Omicron virus is a milder form of the virus. Dr. Doron said that hospitals have been full since before Omicron. The reason that the hospitals are currently full is due to the pandemic since during the height of the pandemic, many individuals did not attend to their illnesses and there were delays in surgeries and testing. Dr. Doron reported that there may be 70 COVID positive patients in the hospital, but they are a completely different COVID patient than earlier in the pandemic. These patients are most often in the hospital for another illness and are testing positive for Covid.

Marcia Testa Simonson reported that the burden of the illness is proportionally much less than it was. Patients are being treated for their co-morbid conditions, but they also test positive for Covid. In addition, it was noted that staffing shortages also impact hospital capacity.

c) Isolation and Quarantine

Ann Marie McCauley reported on the recent changes made by the CDC regarding isolation and quarantine. The new guidelines are designed for working adults (5 days quarantine and then 5 days with a mask). Ms. McCauley and Ashely Hulme reported on how these new guidelines have been a bit confusing and there have been concerns by administration in the schools, pre-schools and day cares as well as parents. Children are able to return to school on day #6 (after quarantine) and they need to have a well-fitting mask. Children are instructed to only take it off when they are at a minimum of six feet away from another individual.

d) COVID Clinics

Ann Marie McCauley reported that she is in the process of learning the new state software, Color. This is the program used for vaccine management, appointments, and clinic flow. The information is entered into Color and then sent to the state with billing and patient information. There have been multiple issues with the program since its inception. The program continues to be cumbersome and frequently crashes.

Wellesley and Babson College

Linda Oliver Grape inquired as to the return of students at the colleges. Lenny Izzo reported that he has a planned meeting with Babson this afternoon. He reported that the athletes returned two weeks ago. Both colleges have solid testing plans in place.

e) Influenza

Ann Marie McCauley reported that there have been a few laboratory confirmed cases of Influenza. Ms. McCauley reported that PCR test kits are not for just Covid alone and that they also test for flu.

f) Masks

Leonard Izzo reported that he is hoping for additional funding for mask purchases. Mr. Izzo said that mask distribution to different business groups would be a tremendous educational opportunity – reaching out to businesses, merchants, and restaurants.

Linda Oliver Grape requested confirmation that surgical masks are being offered to students and that KN95 masks are still being offered to faculty and staff. She highlighted the importance of moving away from the cloth masks in schools. Dr. Lussier confirmed that there is a supply of surgical masks at each school.

Vivian Zeng reported that she has been visiting restaurants and speaking to them regarding masking. All employees and patrons are masked.

3. Environmental Health

a) Food Establishment

Vivian Zeng reported that a new coffee shop intends on opening on Washington Street in Wellesley Hills.

b) Tobacco

As noted at the last meeting, Vivian Zeng reported that a new tobacco retailer is expected to be leasing space in Wellesley. The retailer wishes to open within 500 feet from another tobacco retailer, which would require a variance. To date, no variance request has been submitted.

c) Pool

As noted at the last meeting, Vivian Zeng reported that Boston Sports Club is considering putting forth a variance request to eliminate the lifeguard requirement. Currently they must have one lifeguard in place for every 25 bathers at their swimming pool. The club wishes to install cameras and supervise the pool activity remotely. To date no variance request has been submitted.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

The next Board of Health meeting is scheduled for January 20, 2022, at 12 noon.

Respectfully submitted,

Deadra Doku Gardner, Administrator