

Wellesley Board of Health
Remote Meeting via Zoom
Meeting Minutes
February 17, 2022, 9:00 am

Present:

Board:

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

Staff:

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

In attendance:

Shira Doron, MD, Resident
Regina Laroque, MD Resident
David Lussier, Superintendent, Wellesley Public Schools
Justin Rucci, MD Resident
Beth Sullivan Woods, Select Board

The Board approved the meeting minutes dated February 3, 2022.

Citizen Speak

Dr Justin Rucci identified himself as a pulmonary critical care physician and a parent of children in the Wellesley Public Schools. He added that he represents a group of 150 concerned parents who have signed a petition against the plan to end universal masking in the Wellesley Public Schools. Dr Rucci explained that masking is a simple way to significantly decrease the transmission of the virus. In addition, Dr Rucci stated that in his role as a healthcare consultant for a local preschool it has been clear that masks are well tolerated by the vast majority of children without having a negative impact on their school experience. He does not support removing the mask requirement in the public schools and reported that considerations such as the wastewater rates and vaccination rates in the individual schools needs to be examined before reducing requirements.

Dr Regina LaRocque identified herself as an infectious disease specialist and Associate Professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a Town Meeting

member. Dr LaRocque reported that she supports the statements made by Dr Rucci. She further noted that it is a transition time in our social response to the pandemic. The virus will have surges come and go and that the virus has the capability of mutating. Dr LaRocque noted that we need to not be complacent but prepared for the next surge by data monitoring and wastewater sampling.

Dr LaRocque also noted that she had not received any of the covid test kits available thru the Wellesley Public Schools for her children.

Vice-Chairman's Report

Marcia Testa Simonson reviewed the Commonwealth of Massachusetts cases thru February 14.

Marcia Testa Simonson reported on the recent joint Board of Health and Select Board meeting which took place on February 14, 2022. The two boards voted to modify the September 2021 mask mandate in public buildings. This does not impact the school building mandate which will remain in place. The mandate for all public buildings is to be rescinded on March 7, 2022.

1. Community Health

a) Mask Mandates

The Board of Health reviewed the revisions to the mask mandate in public buildings. Fully vaccinated persons should wear a mask indoors if they have a weakened immune system or if someone in the individual's household is at an increased risk. Detailed mask requirements can be located on mass.gov.

Linda Oliver Grape reported that the best safety is to be vaccinated as the first form of protection.

Leonard Izzo noted that the Wellesley Department of Public Works (DPW) Water and Sewer Division currently do not have the wastewater detection capabilities however the DPW is looking into providing this testing. Mr Izzo further elaborated that the Town masking mandate was not only for town buildings but for employees interacting within the buildings. Employees interacting with the public were required to wear a mask. Mr Izzo noted that this is a step-down approach. Some departments and businesses will continue to wear masks. Any private business can set their own mask requirements.

Dr Shira Doron reported that Massachusetts Department of Higher Education has sent out a second letter pointing out the new mask advisories and asking universities and colleges to follow the new guidelines. Dr Doron provided an overview of the letter noting that masks are no longer being advised for those who are fully vaccinated.

Dr Regina LaRocque responded to the report of the letter noting that the politicians are responding socially. Dr LaRocque noted that this is not responsible public health and that political figures should not be determining the public health response.

b) Wellesley Public Schools (WPS) Update

Dr David Lussier reported on the recent recognition of the town and school nurses. Dr Lussier reviewed the school data noting that the case counts have dramatically decreased. Vaccination rates are exceptionally high and all school buildings have a least an 80% vaccination rate. Data is very positive.

Dr Lussier reported that the administration believes that it is time to transition to a mask optional environment. School populations have become used to hybrid environments where some individuals are masked, and some are not. Dr Lussier believes that the transition to mask optional will be March 7, 2022. This is one week following the return to school from vacation. Dr Lussier reported there are still going to be locations within the school buildings where masks will be required such as the nursing offices.

Dr Lussier further reported that the transportation mask requirement remains a federal mandate so masks will still be required by anyone traveling to and from any school related activity. Dr Lussier reported that students and staff will continue to do as many activities as possible - outdoor lunches are a good practice and will be continued so long as the weather is appropriate. School lunchrooms will be returning to normal operations. Visitors and volunteers will be returning to their usual procedures. Athletics and performing arts have already returned to normal. Field trips are beginning to open up again. The administration continues to encourage vaccines.

Dr Lussier reported that thus far the school department has pushed out thousands and thousands of COVID test kits to the school community. There is still testing available in the schools for anyone presenting with symptoms. Schools are having the air filtration systems upgraded however water fountains will remain closed. Water bottle filling stations remain open. Classrooms will include keeping fresh air coming thru by opening the windows.

Ashely Hulme reported that she anticipates a possible mini surge of the virus on the return to school of staff and students from February break. Families will have the kits at home and will be able to test at home prior to return to school.

Linda Oliver Grape commented that Wellesley is much better prepared than in the past. As we move forward eliminating mandates and changing safety requirements the changes will be anxiety provoking. We will continue to

monitor the data and if needed go back to more stringent guidelines and requirements.

Beth Sullivan Woods noted that one of the mitigation measures is to have the masks available for those who are interested in wearing one. She noted that some children may be uneasy without a mask and some will be thrilled to go without a mask. Ashley Hulme noted that all schools are well stocked with masks should they be needed.

Lenny Izzo also reported that there is an ample supply of masks for town buildings should they be needed. Mr Izzo reported that the regional recently hired two epidemiologists that are collecting data and developing a more robust dashboard.

a) Nursing Update

Ann Marie McCauley reported that the Wellesley positivity rate is at 2.5%. There were fifty-seven (57) positive cases for the week. Thirty-eight (38) of those were at the colleges.

b) Council on Aging - Kitchen

Beth Sullivan Woods reported on the current status of the kitchen at the Tolles Parsons building. The Select Board has voted to include a kitchen study which will be lead by the Facilities Maintenance Department.

c) Council on Aging – Possible Vaccination policy and masking policy

Beth Sullivan Woods reported that the Council on Aging (COA) Board continues to evaluate the possibility of a mandatory vaccination policy. A survey was sent to the COA email list to determine residents' sense of comfort. Data results will be reported at their next meeting. The COA Board is also considering a masking policy for the building.

d) Town of Wellesley Election

The Town election is schedule for March 1, 2022. The mask mandate will still be in place.

2. Environmental Health

a) Food Establishment

Leonard Izzo reported that there are several new food establishments coming to town.

Vivian Zeng reported that she has a set of plans for a new pizzeria located at 99 Central St.

Linda Oliver Grape again expressed concern about the parking for the new specialty grocery store located at 259 Washington St. Ms Zeng provided an update that the Select Board has required a traffic study.

b) Tobacco Variance

At the last several meetings Vivian Zeng has reported that she anticipates a request for a variance from a possible tobacco retailer. No written variance request has been received to date.

c) Camps

Vivian Zeng reported that multiple camps are expected in Wellesley this summer. The public health intern will be assisting staff during the summer months and through next December.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

The next Board of Health meeting is scheduled for March 3, 2022 at 10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Deadra Doku Gardner, Administrator