



Grays Harbor County

Board of Health

PEARSALL BUILDING
2109 SUMNER AVENUE, ABERDEEN, WA 98520

September 23, 2021

8:30 a.m.

Board of Health Special Meeting

Board of Health Chair Vickie Raines called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Board Members Commissioner Kevin Pine and Commissioner Jill Warne were also present.

Also in Attendance: Mike McNickle, Public Health Director; Dr. John Bausher, Public Health Deputy Director; Dr. Bob Lutz, DOH COVID-19 Medical Advisor; Dr. Julie Buck, MD, EMS; Brenda Vail, Board Secretary; and several employees of Public Health and members of the public were also present. The meeting was held electronically over Zoom to allow for social distancing.

This special meeting of the Board of Health was called for a COVID 19 Update by Commissioner Pine.

- Ben Glosenger, GH Public Health Epidemiologist provided a power point presentation regarding the increasing COVID case count. We are in our 5th wave and it is as high as what we saw in the 3rd wave. Sept 1st – 14th we had 1,080 cases per 100,000 which is considered a high case rate. Ben explained the process to determine the case rate's.
 - Commissioner Pine asked about the hospitalization rates and mentioned that he knows several families that are COVID positive, but has not heard of any children being hospitalized.
 - Ben replied that Dr. Lutz could probably respond to that question and that he could spend some time to find out how many younger kids are being hospitalized.
 - Commissioner Warne agreed with Commissioner Pine that they need to know that and we need to show if it is really justified to be putting the brakes on schools for something that is similar to the cold and flu that happens all the time anyways. Commissioner Warne is anxious for the testing when it changes at the end of the year to differentiate out between COVID and influenza.
- Daniel Hannawalt-Morales; GH Public Health Testing and Vaccine Manager provided a power point on booster vaccines. As of 9/21/21 the total doses give in GH County are up to 74,177 doses. Daniel explained the vaccine approval process and the difference between third dose vs booster doses. Booster doses are for the general public and the third dose is for our vulnerable community.

- Commissioner Pine asked if the boosters will protect against the new variants that are being detected.
 - Daniel responded that yes the boosters will help protect against other variants of concern.
- Jon Beltran reported on requiring mandatory vaccination verification for the county with regards to working in a healthcare setting and the recent proclamations. There are no changes and we are waiting for more information on what President Biden speech means for us on a local level and we are good on our understanding and our policies.
- April Heikkila, GH Public Health Manager discussed the reporting process for COVID 19 cases.

Over the counter tests are the least recommended option because the results are not shared with the county and requires the testee to notify the county of their results.

During case investigation, close contacts are identified based on WA DOH guidance and collaboration with employers and are advised based on their vaccination status and if they are experiencing symptoms. All the information is entered into the system so our epidemiologist can determine if we have clusters.

The Grays Harbor County Public Health Case Investigators are overwhelmed and struggling to keep up with contacting people that tested positive.

- Commissioner Pine asked if different counties will have different interpretations to the state guidelines and if we have extra guidelines or at the minimum – GH County promote the safest mitigation.
- Commissioner Pine mentioned that he was informed that members of the Aberdeen High School football team were not allowed to return to practice and/or games even though they tested negative and were cleared to return to in person learning and he wanted to know why they were allowed to return to school but not sports?
- April responded that schools are different on their guidance and allows the student to return for in person learning, but not extracurricular activities because in person learning is more important for our student's mental health than extracurricular activities.

Daniel responded to the question if we are having a shortage of testing supplies. We have seen a shortage of testing supplies but it has not really affected us here in the county but it something we are struggling with along with the State of Washington. We have been able to maintain our testing capacity. Curative at the middle of August they were doing 334 tests per week, by the end of August 532 and they maintained that for 3 weeks; last week we reported 1200 test performed at the Aberdeen and Elma testing sites.

Commissioner Raines showed her appreciation towards April and the Health Department that shared their presentations today.

- Dr. Bob Lutz, MD, MPH – COVID-19 Medical Advisor – DOH discussed sports in reference to Representative Jim Walsh’s email and how it is approached by the DOH and the rating process due to their exposure. The DOH continues to encourage vaccinations for athletes.
 - Commissioner Pine asked Dr. Lutz about football and how the student can go back to in person learning when they test negative, but not go back to extracurricular activities and if the Grays Harbor Public Health is interpreting the rule correctly.

Dr. Lutz stated yes Grays Harbor Public Health is interpreting the rule correctly and there a few protocols in place provided by the CDC that helps keeps the children in school and they deemed that it is more important that the children remain in school and refrain from extracurricular activities and that sports is where we see transmission of diseases on the sidelines and coming to and leaving the games.
 - Commissioner Pine stated that the DOH is encouraging the youth to get vaccinated and wanted to know why? and who we are trying to protect the youth or adults?

Dr. Lutz responded that the recommendations are made to protect the individual from the disease, protect the community and other individuals they come in contact with. Our surges have been driven by young people ages 20-39 and the Delta surge is really effecting youths, 18 years and younger.
 - Commissioner Pine stated that no one between the ages of 12-19 years old has died from COVID and why we are encouraging young people to get the vaccine when their chances of dying is zero?

Dr. Lutz stated that they might not be dying, but they are dealing with lifelong complications. Young people can transmit the Delta variant to their parents and grandparents that are more susceptible and that is why they are encouraging vaccinations for the younger group.

Commissioner Pine stated that our youth are getting sick from COVID and the Delta variant but not dying and that our county survivability rate for this disease is 98.6%, but according to VARS (vaccine adverse event reporting system) the adverse effects on youth is 1-2% and it is as dangerous for the youth to get the vaccine as it is to get COVID.

Dr. Lutz responded that the state is not mandating vaccines for kids but strongly promoting it and getting vaccines are the best way to promote the health of the individual and community and death should not be solely the metric to determine if the vaccines are effective or if they should be encouraging people getting them.
- Commissioner Raines asked that Dr. Lutz discuss the topic of adverse reactions and VARS (vaccine adverse event reporting system).
 - Dr. Lutz responded that all vaccines have side effects and when we look at adverse responses we have a reporting system called V-Safe that is an app that sends you texts and asks you questions regarding your symptoms. VARS is passive i.e. people have to report they had an adverse reaction and it is nationwide system of surveillance. At the

state level they monitor very closely looking for VAR's side effects which we have seen. You can contact the CDC and talk with someone if what they are experiencing is a side effect which goes into the system. These vaccines are incredibly effective in preventing severe disease. 95% positive people in the hospital that tested positive for COVID are not vaccinated.

Commissioner Warne stated she had not heard of V-Safe and asked how V-Safe is reported.

- Dr. Lutz stated it is based on active reporting that is an app that you can download when you get the vaccine. We see symptoms typically within 72 hours so the app will contact you more often

Commissioner Warne asked if the data is being tallied and sharing the V-Safe data?

- Dr. Lutz responded yes it goes into the same data source as VARS and is being monitored by the CDC so it is another means that the CDC is able to capture adverse reactions.

- Mike requested that Dr. Lutz explain about the system and how anybody can add symptoms into the system and how they have to sift through them to determine if it is a reaction to the vaccine or something else.

- Dr. Lutz stated that it takes time to go through the data points is correct and is correctly identifying adverse reactions that is not only for COVID but all vaccines.

- Dr. Julie Buck – discussed EMS and our hospitals. Dr. Buck shared that our healthcare is in crisis mode and the system is overwhelmed. The staffing has been critical at both hospitals, especially nurses. They have closed inpatient beds because they cannot find nurses, there is not enough nurses to staff the ER's. Nurses are stressed and burned out. EMS is understaffed due to losing staff to the I-5 corridor. There is a struggle to transport patients out of the area and it is even worse now because there are no beds for new patients even up north. Our hospitals have often been on divert which mean's that EMS must transport as far away as Tacoma which is taking those EMT's and ambulances out of service which can prevent help being sent to our residents.

- Commissioner Raines asked what the issue is with the staffing levels and if there is light at the end of the tunnel?

Dr. Buck stated she read a study several years ago that nurses and doctors that what is important to them is their schedule and compensation, but it is incredibly difficult to work in a system where there is so few resources where you feel like you cannot care for your patients and it takes its toll and wears you out. We have amazing nurses, docs and medics that stay here because they know the system is better with them than without them.

Dr. Bausher added that he has spoken with the hospitalist and all the patients on ventilators are patients are unvaccinated and the pressure the medical system is feeling.

- If we get people vaccinated, we decrease how many of billions and billions of copies of this mutations are made. It is important we control the disease burden for our system and the people that work in the system. It is not just about the individual it is about the community and we need to do the right thing.
 - Commissioner Pine asked about the wait list at the Grays Harbor College for the nursing program.

Dr. Buck is not familiar with the admission process at the college, but for a couple of years they have been trying to get the college to start a paramedic program but they do not have their DOH state approval for the paramedic program.

- Training for medics and EMT's by Grays Harbor EMS Trauma Care Council has not had funding for 2 years which is adding to the stress of the system.

Commissioner Raines responded that there is a request for ARPA Funding (American Rescue Plan Act) that is being reviewed by legal to make sure the funding can be used for EMS.

Public Chat Comments and Questions:

Louisa Schreier coordinator for GH EMS Trauma Care Council commented on the strain effecting EMS especially in the last 6 months. They are seeing several people get hired by different agencies and then leave before they finish the process here because they are leaving for jobs on the I-5 corridor. She also finds it uncontainable that we are discussing football when children are not allowed to go to school due to their severe health issues.


- Chat box message: ARPA funding (American Rescue Plan Act) for GH EMS is becoming urgent also it would be nice if the college would prioritize local residents for the nursing program so we are more likely to keep them here.
- Chief Fulbright of East GH Fire Rescue commented on the challenge of competing with the I-5 corridor due to the lack of tax base and revenue and the effects on the fire departments. We need financial partnership with our hospitals and asked the commissioner if we get another batch of funding from the American CARES Act if it could be used for staffing and purchase equipment that is critically needed, in particular Bi-Pap machines.
 - Commissioner Raines stated that they have a request in for the county for \$500,000 for GH EMS, they have received one request from FD #2 for power gurneys and suggested Chief Fulbright submit a list of needs.

Hearing no additional public comments, the meeting adjourned at 10:41am.

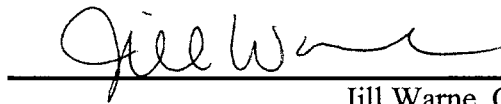
Approved on this 18th day of Oct, 2021



Vickie Raines, Chair



Kevin Pine, Commissioner



Jill Warne, Commissioner

ATTEST:



Brenda Vail, Board Secretary