



Town of Adams • Massachusetts 01220

Board of Health Department

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Approved

Adams Board of Health – Public Meeting Minutes

1st Floor Mahogany Room and Zoom

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

BOH Members Present: Chairman Dr. David Rhoads, Vice-Chair Joyce Brewer, Member Dr. Peter Hoyt

Others Present: Mark Blaisdell-Code Enforcer (virtual), Michelle DeRose-BOH Administrative Assistant, Christine Hoyt-Board of Selectman Vice Chair (virtual), Mike Gleason – Adams Fire Dept (virtual), Dr. Dan Doyle – Berkshire Public Health(virtual), Sandra Martin – Berkshire Public Health (virtual), John Sheerin – Original Seed & Cigar Lounge (virtual), Daniel Jin-Berkshire Eagle (virtual), Brian Rhodes-iBerkshires

Call to Order: Chairman Rhoads called the meeting to order at 4:02pm and read the notice on the recording of the meeting

In person or virtual participation in this meeting is allowed by Ch.20 of the Acts of 2021 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, MGL c.30 §20. The Zoom information is given below. This meeting will be recorded via Zoom; a copy can be provided upon request.

Notices on Recording & Post-Pandemic Waiver to Conduct Public Meeting Virtually (Above)

Note: if you are having trouble joining, please call David B Rhoads, PH.D. BOH Chair, at 781-507-1627.

Direct link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8743213352?pwd=cHE3Z1RkMU51Z3BSR3dnRHBkbE1aZz09>

or go to “zoom.us/join” or call 1-929-436-2866 (New York) and enter meeting information

Meeting ID: 874 3213 3532

Passcode: **162049**

Covid-19 Report:

Dr. Rhoads shared the latest Covid update that continues to be posted on the website regularly. Dr. Rhoads called out a couple of things regarding Booster information.

- There are 2 booster clinics available on Friday, January 14 at Williams College Field House 8 - 10+ am and Saturday, January 15 at St. Elizabeth's North Adams 9am-2pm
- From Medicare: Jan 10 2022: Everyone 18+ should get a booster 2 months after their J&J vaccine or 5 months after completing their primary mRNA vaccine series. Youth ages 12 - 17 should get a booster of Pfizer-BioNTech 5 months after their primary series.

Adams Covid-19 cases had a slight dip in December and had a large increase towards the end of December and the week of January 1 - January 7 had 97 cases with 49% of the individuals were vaccinated.

The difference between last year and this year is on January 3, it shows a significant increase this year of about 3 times as many cases. 2021 = 5,913 and 2022 = 16,891. Although the current Omicron virus symptoms appear to be milder with the help of the vaccines and that it is far more transmissible.

Dr. Rhoads shared a slide based on Adams vaccinated rate as of January 4, 2022 showing that out of the total population of Adams, a total of 69% have been fully vaccinated with about 30% boosted. The older age groups are in

the 90 percentile whereas the younger groups are lower. The booster percentages still show higher numbers in the older generations and lower in the younger age groups. All this is relative to when the individual is due to get their booster. It is recommended that you look into when you may be eligible for the booster shot.

There are breakthrough cases among the vaccinated individuals. As of the January 1 reported cases, about 3% of the 179,594 cases were hospitalized and 1% deaths.

Sandra Martin, Public Health, said that what they have found with the virus Omicron is that it is highly contagious whereas with the other variants, a well fitted layered cloth mask was sufficient to help reduce the number of virus particles. With Omicron, there are much more virus particles managing to get through non-fitted masks. If you are vaccinated, they are finding, you are getting over it much quicker. It is recommended to use N95 or KN95 masks and be sure they are well fitted. We expect about another month of this.

Dr. Rhoads asked the validity of the N95 and KN95. Ms. Martin responded that you want to purchase from a responsible resource and avoid buying from a reseller. The masks should be labeled as to what they are.

Ms. Martin did mention that there are a few masks that will be distributed but will not be enough for your entire population. She mentioned that these masks could be reused by washing out, placing them in the sun or paper bag. It is not recommended to do this in a hospital environment.

Ms. Martin said that testing is one of the tools we have that we are underutilizing. There are 2 types of tests.

- 1) PCR test is the gold standard and looks for the molecules of the virus and it takes a bit longer for results
- 2) Antigen test that looks to how your body has reacted to a potential infection

Home tests can be very accurate if you use them when you have symptoms. It is best to stay home if you are having symptoms until test results come back or if you are still unsure.

The new guidance suggests that you may be contagious for approximately 5 days. Longer if your immune systems are already compromised. Could be shorter if you are vaccinated. This is a rough guide. Ms. Martin highly suggests to wear a mask out in public regardless of your vaccination status.

Dr. Dan Doyle agreed with all that Ms. Martin has spoken of regarding this topic. He is seeing that the amount of cases coming through, approximately 50% are vaccinated. Although we have about 5 times more the number of cases from last year, the hospitalizations are lower and that has much to do with vaccination and getting booster shots. Vaccinated individuals that are hospitalized are not in there as long as the unvaccinated. The hospital system does have the ability to administer a type of monoclonal antibody therapy that is available and effective against Omicron. However, it is in limited supply so they screen patients for their suitability for it based on medical comorbidities.

Dr. Doyle mentioned that the state contracted with an organization, Gotham, for this therapy and Pittsfield does get a supply of this from the state. They are trying to get this available in North Adams as well. They continue to do pop up clinics for boosters. There are a couple in North County this week and one at BCC on January 22.

Ms. Martin stated that fully vaccinated currently means have the one J&J vaccine or the two Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. Very soon, it will be considered that fully vaccinated includes the necessary booster shots.

Dr. Rhoads had the following questions and if these would help

- Advisability of mandating public space indoor masking
- Required vaccine "passports" for public dining or in certain entities such as town employees or school systems.
- Vaccine mandates

Ms. Martin responded that if everyone wore a well fitted mask, we could bring this under control more rapidly. It is understood that it is not practical for everyone to wear a mask in public all the time and does not want to see restaurants go out of business. To support the restaurants and keeping those employees safe, she encourages people to do take out instead of dining in the restaurant. She thinks it's a good idea to mandate public space indoor masking and feels that it would be easier to enforce if the State steps up and supports it similarly when the smoking in public space became a regulation. Many countries are going towards vaccine mandates and needing to show proof of vaccination. Massachusetts is going to be making an electronic version of your vaccine card. It's easier to have all the communities be on the same page about mandates. The concern would be how it would be implemented and enforced. She suggested speaking with the restaurants to get their thoughts.

Dr. Doyle made a point that whether you are vaccinated or not, you may still be carrying the virus and passing it along. If you do not allow an unvaccinated person into your establishment, you are not protecting those in the restaurant, but the unvaccinated person trying to come in. The real key to fight this virus, is to get vaccinated and take necessary precautions and continue living your life. The reason for the vaccines is to reduce the number of hospitalizations and/or the symptoms. One of the biggest challenges the hospitals are facing now is the employees are out on isolation because they have Omicron. Those working have been dealing with this for 2 years now and they are getting burnt out. State policy is that elective surgeries are being canceled or postponed at this time and that staff is deployed to other departments to help

Dr. Rhoads shared 4 comments that Town folks submitted. He summarized the comments that they advocated for indoor masking mandate as they are shopping elsewhere as businesses are not enforcing masking. Another asked for a full-fledged community wide push providing masks and requiring employees and Town employees to mask, be vaccinated and to provide greater access for vaccinations such as transportation and local clinics

Dr. Rhoads said that we have been accused of being business "unfriendly" here at the Board of Health. He would like to consider us as business "safe" and that's his goal. Dr. Rhoads thanked Dr. Doyle and Ms. Martin for joining us and providing their feedback and they left the meeting at 4:32pm.

Dr. Hoyt addressed those comments. When we had the clinics this past year, the Council on Aging had been providing transportation. We did a good job at providing people with the opportunity of getting vaccinated. Currently, the local pharmacies and doctors' offices and other clinics in the area are available now and there is not a need for an additional clinic in Adams.

Mrs. DeRose brought up the point that local folks are having issue finding testing clinics available as many have been booking a week out. Dr. Rhoads said that there are over the counter testing kits available at local markets and pharmacies when they are in stock.

Dr. Rhoads asked the Board's thoughts about mandates, masking in schools. Mr. Sheerin asked to speak. Dr. Rhoads suggested that he submit a comment. A public hearing may be decided later at future meeting.

Dr. Hoyt was concerned that enforcing may be the issue if we put a mandate in place and asked if we have the manpower for enforcement? Mr. Blaisdell responded that he is pleased to serve no matter what the Board decides. He is aware that some businesses already have mask mandates in place in Adams and other communities. If it is decided that a mandate is the route to be taken, then a public hearing would be required. Another option is an Public Health Order be put in place by Mr. Blaisdell and the Board would meet within 48 hours to approve the order.

Dr. Rhoads made a suggestion that the businesses could get a seal of approval by the Board of Health if the businesses follow the necessary criteria of employees being vaccinated and masked. Other communities have done something similar. Could this be a consideration?

Mr. Blaisdell said that he managed the enforcement when the State of Emergency order was in place when the pandemic started in 2020. Yes, it was a greater workload, but it was not unmanageable.

Dr. Rhoads said that this discussion will be continued to the next meeting in 3 weeks. That will allow more comments to come in from the public. Ms. Brewer commented, that what we are seeing right now could be the post-holiday bubble and in 3 weeks, could see a trend of the numbers coming down. She is a strong advocate of educating and engaging people to empower them with making informed decisions. She would like to hear from businesses what challenges they face with their employees about masking. Dr. Hoyt suggested since Mr. Sheerin (business owner) is present at this meeting, can he provide us with his feedback?

Mr. Sheerin's position on masking and vaccination is this. He cannot speak to other businesses that have multiple employees, as he is a one man operation. He is vaccinated and that was his personal choice. He is okay with sharing that information of himself, but knows that others feel that their medical information is private and should remain so. He feels it would be difficult to enforce in small businesses such as his place. He follows suit of his customers. If his customer is masking and won't come in until he is masked, he is happy to do so. There are other customers that come in unmasked, unvaccinated and there has been no issue thus far. Mr. Sheerin suggested that we continue with a "strong ask" to mask and not make it mandatory as he feels he would lose about 75% of his customers in a matter of days.

Dr. Rhoads rethought his phrase of "Seal of Approval by the Board of Health" and that it may cause more issue. However, some of the comments received were stating that they would shop elsewhere because the business was not requiring masking. The message we are really trying to convey is "Let's keep each other safe". It was decided to continue this discussion at the next meeting and possibly invite some of the local businesses. Mr. Sheerin agreed to join the next meeting.

Mr. Blaisdell expressed that many of our businesses are locally owned, not corporate owned. The local businesses are the ones that will be mostly impacted by a mask mandate decision. The majority of people are conscientious of the their own vulnerability and will mask up. However, if mandated and if they forgot their mask and end up having to walk all the way back to their car to retrieve a mask, they may decide to not return to the store and just drive off. If not mandated, they could take the chance and just go in, do their business and continue on.

Dr. Rhoads asked Dr. Hoyt to revise the narrative on the website and Dr. Rhoads will also continue the request line for comments related to this discussion. Dr. Hoyt agreed.

Public Hearing:

None

Approval of Minutes: December 15: Dr. Rhoads had not had a chance to review. He requested to postpone the approval to the next meeting.

Code Enforcement Officer:

None

Old Business:

- **Discover Books – Donation Bin Update**

Dr. Rhoads met with Tim Cota (Operations Supervisor) at the Transfer Station. There is a place available there for the Donation Bin, however that is contingent upon nothing else happening at the Transfer Station. There is potential that the Transfer Station could get a compactor, and if that happens, there will not be space for the donation bin. Getting a compactor would be a good thing since we pay by the truckload. Dr. Rhoads will converse with Linda Cernik and look into other places this donation bin could be placed.

- **2023 Budget considerations**

Dr. Rhoads will meet with Jay Green and Crystal Wojcik regarding the budget. The public health nursing is going to be the largest piece of discussion as the cost will be around \$5000 which is up from the \$4000. The Alliance was being generous this year since we were under stick shock from the previous price of the Visiting Nurses price of just over \$2000. Turns out that Williamstown and North Adams pay much more. \$5000 relates to about 2 hours a week at \$50/hour which they put in much more time than that.

New Business:

- **Opioid Harm Reduction Services / Syringe Services Program (BOAPC)**

Dr. Rhoads asked for a motion to approve Harm Reduction Services for the Town of Adams specifically to allow a qualified and appropriate organization to operate a mobile syringe services program in the Town of Adams. Ms. Brewer motioned, Dr. Hoyt seconded. Dr. Rhoads said that if this motion is approved, nothing will go into action until the minutes of this meeting is approved. All first responders will be made aware of this prior to this being implemented. Mike Gleason was on the Zoom meeting, but was called away. Dr. Rhoads will look into the logistics before implemented. All voted yes unanimously.

- **Annual Report ideas / recommendations**

Dr. Rhoads asked the Board to think of ideas to include in the Annual Report to prepare an outline to be ready for the next meeting. Additional data information will be gathered from Dr. Rhoads, Mr. Blaisdell and Mrs. DeRose.

Local & County Updates:

No discussion

Upcoming Events:

- **1/13: Berkshire Public Health Alliance Governing Board**

No discussion

Review Mail:

none

For the Good of the Order

- Dr. Hoyt mentioned the Booster clinic in North Adams this Saturday.
- Daniel Jin of the Berkshire Eagle joined the Zoom meeting and Dr. Rhoads welcomed him and appreciates all the work he does.

Schedule Next Meetings: February 2, 2022

Public Comment:

none

Adjournment:

Dr. Rhoads asked for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Brewer so moved, Dr. Hoyt seconded. Voted Yes unanimously. Adjourned at 5:20pm

Respectfully Submitted,



Michelle DeRose
Administrative Assistant

2/15/2022

Date