



**CITY OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS**  
Department of Health & Human Services  
Division of Public Health



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Matilde Castiel, MD  
Health & Human Services  
Commissioner

Karyn E. Clark  
Public Health  
Director

**DATE:** January 4, 2021  
**RE:** WORCESTER BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING  
**START TIME:** 6:30 PM  
**LOCATION:** WEBEX MEETING

**Welcome & Introductions:**

Meeting was called to order at 6:34pm.

Members on WebEx: Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair, Frances Anthes, Chareese Allen and David Fort  
WPDH Staff: Karyn Clark, Director of DPH, Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH, and Patricia Bruchmann, RN, Chief Public Health Nurse; Guest: Stephanie Williams, Chief Diversity Officer

**Approval of the December 7, 2020 Meeting Minutes:**

Motion to approve the WBOH meeting minutes of December 7, 2020 made by Chareese Allen  
Seconded by Frances Anthes –with an amendment– Approved

**Welcome New Chief Diversity Officer, Stephanie Williams:**

Stephanie Williams, Chief Diversity Officer: Primary role is to examine our policies and practices around diversity, equity and inclusion internally within the municipality. Looks forward to hearing from a variety of voices on what the thoughts and concerns are. If we are truly making change within the municipality around our policies and practices it needs to be everybody's responsibility.

**Review and discuss updates on influenza:**

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Mask wearing also seems to have an effect on the spread of the flu. The flu vaccination program that we normally have for school children, has been put on hold because the Worcester Public Schools are remote. The Worcester Public School Nurses will be helping WDPH with COVID-19 vaccinations and contact tracing.

Patricia Bruchmann, RN, Chief Public Health Nurse: We are getting very few reports of influenza through the MAVEN system at this point compared to what we have normally seen. The mandated flu vaccine deadline has been pushed back to February 28<sup>th</sup> for the school students. Hopefully by then we'll have a better percentage of students vaccinated.

David Fort: With the DCU Center open for COVID-19 patients, how many have you seen come in for influenza?



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Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: The DCU Center had started out with 25 beds. They now have the capacity of 75 beds. About 63 of the beds are occupied now. The average age is 65 years old. The DCU Center is being used as a direct admission for milder cases of COVID-19 that could come directly from the emergency departments of Saint Vincent Hospital and UMass Hospital or are being transferred in from Boston Medical Center. About twenty percent of the patients are from Boston Medical Center. Any patient that goes into the DCU Center is offered a flu vaccine.

### **COVID-19 Updates:**

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: We started surging after Thanksgiving. The Mercantile Center where they are doing the Stop the Spread COVID-19 testing, have been doing about 1,000 tests per day. The contact tracing is being done by a corporation in Boston that was sub-contracted called Partners in Health. If you have a positive individual interfacing with co-workers, family members and/or traveling, you are exposing a lot of people to the illness. We are expecting a bigger surge during this holidays up to New Years. Even though the vaccine is here and we're all feeling good about the fact we are in the roll out phase, this is a dangerous time for us. People are letting their guards down and not being careful as they should be. Asks for people to continue to wear a mask, wash your hands and watch your distance. There are 12,000 cases that have been recorded in Worcester County, 8,000 have been in Worcester. We have had 300 COVID-19 deaths (most have been over 75 years old). UMass Hospital has given approximately 6,500 vaccinations, Saint Vincent Hospital 2,400 thus far. The City of Worcester will serve as an agent to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) to administer vaccinations to public safety officials and first responders in Worcester and to the six alliance towns WDPH serves through the Central MA Regional Public Health Alliance (Grafton, Holden, Leicester, Millbury, Shrewsbury and West Boylston). First Responders eligible for a vaccine at this time are Police, Fire, EMS and dispatch. Vaccination will begin on Monday, January 11 at the Worcester Senior Center, 128 Providence St. Medical students will be trained on giving the vaccination with the help of the Graduate School of Nursing at UMass. We are providing the Moderna vaccine. After your first vaccination, you will receive your second vaccination on the 28<sup>th</sup> day. There are 3 phases to receiving the vaccine. Please continue to monitor the mass.gov website to see which phase you are in.

Chareese Allen: People that had COVID-19 and that are getting vaccinated, seem to have a more severe reaction to the first vaccine. Wondering why that happens. What are we doing to build confidence for communities of color to receive the vaccine?

Karyn Clark, Director of DPH: Dr. Matilde Castiel, Commissioner of HHS is doing a Town Hall tonight for Black Families Together to talk about the vaccine regarding the distrust and hesitancy the communities of color have on getting the vaccine. There is continued conversation with the Health Equity Task Force. There are a number of sub-committees that are focusing on messaging. The Health Foundation of Central Mass has put \$100,000 to specifically work on a vaccine campaign so that theirs a support team to inform these conversations. MDPH is working on a number of different ways to get the message out.

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Individuals that have had COVID-19 should wait 90 days before getting the vaccine.

David Fort: Asked Dr. Hirsh if the healthcare workers in Worcester are reluctant to taking the vaccine?

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Saint Vincent Hospital and UMass Hospital are about 85 – 90 percent of healthcare workers getting the vaccine. We see the reluctant in First Responders. 60 percent – yes, 40 percent – no. Briefed the BOH on the science and process that went into developing the vaccine.

Frances Anthes: Suggests we give out information about how the vaccine was developed and how it works. Glad to hear that the Graduate School Nurses will be part of giving the vaccine. Questions if the retirees, nurses, LPN's, can help also.

Karyn Clark, Director, DPH: We have been planning for Emergency Dispensing Sites for a pandemic. Most of our flu clinics for many years were run as drills to meet a CDC requirement for our Emergency Preparedness plans. We are working on getting appropriate volunteers for registration, screening, data entry for billing, vaccination and monitoring individuals in the recovery area. We have medical and non-medical volunteers who have been training for this. WDPH will start vaccinating first responders, by appointment only, next week. Pharmacies are contracted with long term care facilities, which is going well. Grocery stores will also be helping. As we continue to move forward there will be more opportunities and places for people to get vaccinated.

David Fort: Have any of you taken the vaccine?

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Received the Moderna vaccine last week. Minimal discomfort in the muscle in my arm for a day and a half.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Any updates on the mental health during COVID-19?

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Matilde Castile, MD and the Mayor have a Task Force on mental health. They have been looking at the issues of isolation, depression and suicides during COVID-19. Worcester District Attorney, Joseph Early, stated this past year there was 16 firearm suicides in Worcester County. I am on the School Advisory Committee for the Worcester Public Schools system, and we have a number of pediatricians and family medicine doctors who are very concerned about the isolation, lack of socialization and feeling that the students are falling behind with this virtual education mode. We had initiated an elders buddy program, where medical students, graduate school students and graduate nursing students, have been given the opportunity (with the help of Amy Waters and Suki Lapin, both from the Senior Center) to pair with an elder who was isolated and helped them with their questions and concerns.

Karyn Clark, Director, DPH: Mental Health is a priority area in the current Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). Will review priority populations and areas that have come to the surface. Looking at strategies for our next CHIP. What we are seeing in the preliminary findings of the CHIP is talking about trauma, which has been a huge component of what people of color have been feeling, not only with racism and discrimination but also with COVID-19.

Frances Anthes: We should step away from what students missed and how much they need to catch up and think about reinforcing what they have survived. What they have been able to do well and how for the first time in a pandemic they figured out a way how to go to school. Students are

learning and communicating with their teachers and peers. We could get stuck in what they missed and not give them credit for what they experienced, lived through and gained.

**Review and discuss updates on opioid epidemic:**

Tabled for next BOH meeting

Motion to adjourn; Frances Anthes - seconded by Chareese Allen

**Adjourn** 8:08pm

**Next Meeting -- February 1, 2021 at 6:30pm**

**Potential Future Meeting Topics:**

Plan to invite Diversity Officer, Stephanie Williams for conversation

Legislation signed by Governor Baker about Police reform and how it relates to the City of Worcester

Updates on COVID19

Updates on opioid