

Public Health Advisory Council (PHAC) Meeting Minutes

February 11, 2020



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.



ATTENDING: Ann Marie Paulsen, David Eppelsheimer, Robin Bouquest, Hemi Pariyani, Jennifer McElravey, Larysa Thomas, Nicole Bowles (call-in), Sonja Ackman, Pam Treece, Tom Engle, Larry Boxman, Eileen Derr, Karen Reynolds (call-in), Shabba Woodley, Dick Stenson, Andrea Lara Silva

ABSENT: Leticia Vitela

STAFF: Tricia Mortell, Alex Coleman, Vivianna Lindley, Ahmed Mohamed

COMMUNITY MEMBERS: Lillie Miller, Blake Nelson

Welcome

Annie opened the meeting with introductions and an ice breaker.

Approve February Meeting Minutes

February's minutes were reviewed. Jennifer McElravey motioned to approve the minutes, and Larry Boxman seconded. All in favor and none opposed. The motion was passed.

PHAC Updates

- The county boards have started to recruit for open positions. BOC will be conducting a campaign to attract interest. The campaign will consist of photos of board members with a small message from the member about why they are part of a board. The idea is to spread the word about different boards and who is part of them. Please let Alex know if you are interested. Alex will send out information about this campaign.
- Tricia reviewed the ethics deliberation requirement for public health accreditation.

COVID-19 Update

Tricia Mortell gave an update on the COVID-19 response in Oregon and Washington County.

- Washington County received questions right away if people would be provided masks for required public interaction like court dates. It will be up to the legal system to make decisions around postponing court events, but these populations are not prioritized to have masks.
- A priority list has been created for mask distribution and 5 million in funding from the state was approved by the legislature to support response to the epidemic.
- News is changing every day for COVID-19. The signs are still not conclusive. We are keeping track of every known case and associates of the cases and proceeding accordingly with isolation and quarantine.

- Public Health is not monitoring businesses policies on isolation for sick workers. We cannot control how a business handles isolation within their organizations.
- There are currently no deaths in Oregon from COVID-19
- Children are not known to become seriously ill with this disease
- Closing schools may not benefit controlling the disease since children are not known to be an at-risk group.
- We have not been able to test all of Washington County, so we do not know how many people have COVID-19 in our community. We are only aware of reported cases.

Questions/Comments from PHAC

Q: Why isn't EMS staff top priority to get masks? **A:** They are in the first tier of priority and have their own supply. If they run out, then they will move to top priority. EMS staff are monitoring use of masks and keeping a close inventory.

Q: Which masks are being bought for this emergency supply? Surgical masks or the N95 masks? **A:** Right now, it is both. Type is determined if use is for a patient or health worker.

Q: How thorough and effective is the cleaning of schools where patients have been? **A:** Cleaning is a viral protection; it is only as good as the frequency of the cleaning. Schools are making decisions to focus more on cleaning high touch surfaces. The schools closing to clean means nothing. There no special cleaning that needs to happen for COVID, it's the same as the routine cleaning.

Q: How are you monitoring those in isolation and quarantine? **A:** They are given detailed instructions of what to do. The instructions are an agreement they sign which they are expected to follow. Currently there is complete cooperation in Washington County for these requests. The individual will also be given a thermometer (if they don't have one) to monitor their temperature.

Q: How do you identify all the people a patient has been in contact with? **A:** We are only identifying close contacts (within six feet for an hour or more). The incubation period is 5-6 days. **Q:** What is your capacity for tracking this? **A:** We won't be monitoring this as closely if the numbers get higher.

Q: What kind of process is in place if patients disregard the request from Public Health and leave quarantine or isolation? **A:** Tricia Mortell can request and issue a court ordered isolation or quarantine, but at this time that has not been necessary.

Q: If incubation is 5-6 days does that mean isolation is no more than a week? **A:** It differs. If someone has had contact with someone who is positive, they are monitored for 14 days. If someone tests positive, they are monitored for 7 days after their positive test or 3 days after their symptoms start.

Q: How are you addressing the hysteria? **A:** This is very difficult, but we are making efforts to get the correct information out to the public. The county has activated the Emergency Operations Center to support the public and 211 lines have extended their hours for questions.

Q: Are we telling the community not to travel? **A:** Right now, messaging is geared towards vulnerable populations to avoid crowds and poorly ventilated areas like airplanes. We have not issued statements about local, out of state, or international travel.

Q: Are children not symptomatic after being exposed? **A:** As of right now we are not seeing symptoms in young children. **Q:** Do we know if they are immune? **A:** We do not have a test for immunity. We can only test if a person does or does not have the disease.

Q: What should we expect in years to come? It seems like we keep getting stronger diseases every year. **A:** We cannot speak to that. COVID-19 is not necessarily stronger. It is only spreading quickly because it is a novel disease. We cannot know the death toll yet because we are in the early stages.

Annual Ethics Deliberation

Alex gave a presentation on Social Distancing and the group deliberated the topic. See PowerPoint and supporting documents for more information. The council discussed the implications of social distancing and debated the risks and what public health departments would be responsible for if they enforced social distancing.

Risks to enforcing or not enforcing Social Distancing:

- Financial harm to businesses
- School closures may impact food availability for children who rely on school lunch programs
- Closing of schools and childcare facilities cause loss of wages in parents who need to stay home
- Lost wages for employees put on isolation or quarantine
- Loss of education for students if schools close
- Public reassured of action from the government, but the individual is not encouraged to take effective preventative actions
- We don't enforce and get it wrong causing more disease spread and more deaths
- Inequitable risk to minorities and vulnerable populations from enforcing
- More panic comes with more restrictions and warnings
- Estimated that 60% of the population would have the disease without intervention
- Isolation increases risk of depression and loneliness for those living alone or who are older adults
- Increased vulnerability to the disease for those isolated by themselves since no one is directly monitoring them
- It would be worth it to cancel large events such as the St. Patrick's Day parade because it will lessen the burden on the public health workforce and restrain the spread of germs
- New York is a good place to watch to make an informed decision. The governor has called in the national guard to bring in supplies. (Not a military lockdown) Seattle is also enforcing social distancing right now. They have closed some school districts and canceled large events.
- Instead of closing events we should focus on protecting the populations vulnerable to COVID-19
- We need to look at different cases and make an informed decision
- Should we recommend full social distancing, or only implement parts of it?

- There is an obligation for the individuals at risk to keep themselves safe because if they get the disease, they will be taking away resources from other at-risk population
- Organizations and businesses are wanting public health organizations to make the decision of social distancing for them, but this choice can only be informed by public health and businesses must make it themselves.

What should Washington County Public Health be responsible for if Social Distancing is enforced?

- The only time Washington County Public Health is legally responsible for taking care of an individual is if the isolation is court ordered
- It is difficult to ask someone to self-isolate if we cannot protect them from the effects of loss of income
- Virginia Garcia Medical Center is providing education and support to those they ask to self-isolate
- Making sure education for students is maintained during school closures; social distancing could cause a child to be left behind in the education system
- Some people will lose income and could lose their jobs, how can we prevent this?
- Not everyone can work and do school from home. How do we protect these people?
- County government needs to assist access to food and medicine – how do you ensure you are equitably providing food to everyone? i.e. different cultures and diets.
 - Ethically there needs to be a full plan in place before enforcing isolation and providing food and medication
 - As a public health organization Washington County decided we are morally obligated to take care of those in need of support who are in isolation or quarantine. The county is actively providing food and other supplies and looking into rent assistance for these individuals right now.

Questions and comments from PHAC

Q: Are we at the level of Italy or China yet? **A:** We don't know and that is the problem. The region is split over if we should enforce social distancing or not. It may help mitigate the spread of disease, but it also causes a lot of harm in the community.

Q: Who oversees the guidelines if social distancing was taken to the next step? **A:** The board of commissioners.

Public Health Updates:

- Alex announced the winners for the National Public Health Week awards

Closing:

Next meeting April 14th.