

Holyoke Board of Health
Monday, February 1, 2021 at 6:00 P.M.
Holyoke, MA 01040
ZOOM

Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Patricia A. Mertes, Chair
Dr. Esteban A. Del Pilar-Morales, MD, Vice Chair
Dalila Hyry-Dermith, Clerk
Sean Gonsalves, RS, Health Director
Deborah Schaier, Public Health Nurse
Beatriz Colon, Head Clerk
Terrance Murphy, City Councilor
Dennis Hohenberger, Reporter Masslive-Republican

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Patricia A. Mertes, Chair called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Mr. Gonsalves began by explaining process and locations of the Phase 2 COVID-19 Vaccine administration.

Both Stop & Shop Pharmacy locations will be offering the vaccine on site by appointment only. They are getting all logistics in order. The Holyoke Health Center wants to do more vaccination, but the supply is limited. Most BOHs are receiving allotment of 100 doses at most and some small clinics are having doses refills delayed or re-allocated. The Northampton Clinic can vaccinate 1100 people per week but are only receiving 100 doses a week. The State's MCVF (Massachusetts COVID Vaccine Program) informed there may be delays in filling the first doses and may not be filled all at once. There's not strong supply to meet demand. There is also a vaccination clinic on Whitney Avenue near the Holyoke Mall.

The Holyoke Senior Center is helping seniors 65 and older register and schedule for vaccination via telephone or email. Some are having challenges registering online and have requested to be vaccinated at the center. The HBOH is talking about the possibility of having their vaccination clinic at Senior Center but there are still some staff and administration challenges to resolve. MDPH's PrepMod connects to the MIIS (Mass Immunization Information System) data base. Registrations and appointments for first and second doses can be scheduled there. Insurance billing may be a possibility, but qualified individuals are needed. The Senior Center staff could be included. We also need medical staff to physically administer the vaccine. A second clinic needs to be done for the second dose. This needs more discussion. There's quite a bit involved and other logistics to figure out, but Ms. Schaier is interested in doing it. Johnson & Johnson is working on a single dose vaccine that might be ready for the summer.

Action Ambulance is interested in being part of the clinic. They have experience running clinics and their EMTs are trained for vaccine administration. They've also

worked with the Holyoke Medical Center in the past and are contracted with the city as a Massachusetts provider. However, they cannot source the vaccine and supplies; the HBOH will have to provide that. There are two nurses interested in working the Holyoke Senior Center clinic.

The nursing program at HCC has professors and students that are interested in participating. The course requires them to do clinical hours. Students cannot administer the vaccine, but they can help with enrollment, answering questions, filling paperwork and help with the observation period. The MIIS requires the information be input within twenty-four (24) hours of administration. This takes up administrative time. An administration fee can be rendered but the vaccine is free specified by the state. Mr. Gonsalves prefers an agency with more experience partner with us since there's billing and other costs involved. There are funds available for volunteers but if the local ambulance or HHC gets involved this will free up the department from the administrative financial burden.

MCDP requires anyone getting a vaccine fill out a form. This requires a Medical officers' signature. Dr. Del Pilar agreed to sign the electronic document. He recognizes we are not ready to open but wants all aspects to be resolved prior to opening the clinic.

Mr. Gonsalves stated local BOHs are not required to run clinics but if one is opened, will the state expect us to run it continuously? The department does not have the necessary resources to sustain clinics for months; we still have other rolls to fulfill. Our priority is to make sure that the senior and vulnerable population is taken care of and not being overlooked. He is hoping to run a limited clinic and knows the allotment will be limited. It will have to be a targeted clinic. He wants to know the boards' interest in opening a small clinic in Holyoke. He was informed the slots in the Springfield clinic filled up quickly.

Ms. Mertes asked if the 100 doses a week will be over a period of time. Mr. Gonsalves was informed by the state that the allotment to most BOHs is 100 per week per availability. Westfield has been waiting on supplies for a couple of weeks. Moderna is in short supply. Pfizer has a larger availability. BOHs are scheduled to receive Moderna but it's in short supply. Only a few places are able to store Pfizer because not every place has the needed refrigerators for storage. Stop & Shop, HBOH or Holyoke Health Center will not be handling those vaccines. Ms. Schaier wants to know what will happen when a vial is open and people don't show up to. Vaccines expire and need to be used before that date. Ms. Mertes wants to know what the Senior Centers response is. They started taking calls last week to schedule and register patients and have about 100 people signed up. Mr. Gonsalves informed that some regional clinics are operating, others are not. Chicopee does not have a BOH clinic. Westfield is waiting for supply. The HHC and HMC vaccinated all of the first responders right away along with other communities as well.

Dr. Del Pilar said that Baystate clinic is completely done by schedule. A lottery list was created for those parties interested in case of cancellations. It is on a call basis and they need to be at the hospital right away. Appointments for the second dose are done while receiving the first vaccine. This randomized computerized system ensures every single dose is used.

Ms. Mertes asked if there is any interest from HMC and HHC to partner with the BOH. Mr. Gonsalves talked to Action Ambulance, Western MassElder Care and HHC. HHC has a list but their priority is making sure their patients are taken care of first. They're also struggling to obtain enough vaccines to handle the need. At this moment there is not enough to generate a partnership. The Mayor's Office has had weekly discussions with Veterans Services but the quantity of vaccine is also limited.

Councilor Murphy thanked the BOH for all their hard work and complimented the Baystate Clinic at the Whitney Avenue location. He's had communication with a couple of people that were able to sign in and schedule both appointments online. This is crucial for full potential results and to prevent waste. A number of people have been vaccinated at the Eastfield Mall. He asked how Stop & Shop is going to handle the observation period after vaccine administration with their space limitation. Mr. Gonsalves stated Big Y will be asking patients to sit at the pharmacy for vaccine administration and observation. These will be by appointment only. Stop & Shop in Feeding Hills is already operating Phase 1 priority. This may be based on the capacity of the pharmacy.

Mr. Gonsalves feels the Senior Center is the best venue for the BOH to hold a clinic. This location will provide better access for the 75 and over population in Holyoke. The local BOHs can order vaccines from the state but the challenge is supply availability. He explained the process and criteria for ordering vaccines. Site capacity needs to be determined. It will be the BOH's responsibility to staff and operate the clinic. Before opening logistics and billing need to be figured out. He heard the website to sign up is confusing and some people have received calls asking for credit card information. Are in a position to make sure it becomes a prevalent website. Will there be significant increase in vaccine doses in the next few weeks? The state's website states that vaccine supply is limited and it may take significant time to obtain an appointment.

Dr. Del Pilar said the www.workwell.com is simplistic and used by employees for scheduling appointments, screenings and getting test results. After registration an email is sent out and individual will be scheduled for second dose. Individuals can schedule themselves and if they're a patient at Baystate their information is already in the system. They have a lot of patients that don't have email and are not computer savvy and they made it simple for them. The HBOH has funds but the logistics have to be decided. The financial resources are not the main stumbling block.

Mr. Murphy feels the BOH has had a good impact in the senior population. He wants to know if we need more vaccine, staffing and money will the city make funds available to vaccinate the population of Holyoke. Mr. Gonsalves said the financial source is not the

issue. We need to figure out the logistics. The state will be setting up a call center to provide easier access to the vaccine. If you are eligible and don't have access to or are not comfortable with the website someone from the commonwealth will help with scheduling. The excerpt of google maps is for vaccine locations; further website navigation is needed for registration.

CVS has partnered with the BOH in the past years with Pneumonia and Tetanus vaccines. It would be great if CVS and Walgreens would participate with us. They are well synchronized and associated with the process. The pharmacies have the FPPP (Federal Pharmacy Participation Program) and are associated with the many stage phases of vaccination. Demand of their services have been extremely overwhelming. They have affordable and congregate facilities, shelters, long term facilities, senior facilities, etc. The challenge is not supply but staff and manpower to service the need.

Ms. Mertes asked the percentage of first responders that have been vaccinated in Holyoke? HFD is 80%, HPD is close to 70%. Not everyone is interested in getting vaccinated. Also, if you've had COVID in past 90 days you cannot get it. Some firefighters are waiting to get vaccinated because they weren't eligible at the time of vaccination. School nurses are doing rapid testing at school and most of them have been vaccinated. As eligibility moves up people are scheduling appointments.

There has been a lot of hesitancy from the public. Many have been vaccinated and are not having serious side effects and allergic reactions. The majority of school nurses have been vaccinated. They are doing the rapid tests at schools and observations when students are isolated or are asymptomatic in class.

In summary, we are looking for available options and what the next steps are. Almost all those we can partner with have their own priorities. The logistics of when, where, how and volume we can meet have to be worked out.

Sean will forward the MCVP draft form to Dr. Del Pilar. If the HBOH does not have enough space, we will talk to the Senior Center for storage. It takes a week for approval once submitted and a survey will be sent out about doses.

When the vaccines come into the office about a hundred of them can be stored in the nurse's fridge. These can only be transported one time. If we don't have enough space, we will contact the Senior Center.

Mr. Gonsalves is working on possibly creating a mobile vaccine clinic unit for those individuals that have two or more comorbidities and have a challenge with mobility. Transportation or limited transportation can be provided on a need basis to make sure they are not left out. The Senior Center is also collecting that information.

Dr. Del Pilar will talk to Baystate Hospital if they can provide with some support.

Patti adjourned meeting at 6:50p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Dalila Hyry-Dermith, Clerk