

Holyoke Board of Health  
Thursday, February 3, 2022, at 6:30 P.M.  
Holyoke, MA 01040  
ZOOM

**Meeting Minutes**

**RECEIVED**

**MAY 3 1 2022**

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, PHN  
Beatriz Colon, Head Clerk

**Holyoke City Clerk's  
Holyoke, MA**

Mrs. Patricia A. Mertes, Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Ms. Mertes proposed the Commissioners remain in their current titles and positions for the following term. Ms. Dalilah Hyry-Dermith was appointed Commissioner by the Mayor for another term. She feels privileged to work for the Board. Proposal seconded by Ms. Hyry-Dermith and Dr. Del Pilar. All in favor 0 opposed.

Educate to Vaccinate Campaign has contacted more than 200 local business owners and/or managers. At the moment, this is a flyer campaign. 250 handbooks will be printed and distributed to lobbies, offices, the library, the Chamber of Commerce, Doctors' offices and other businesses. Half in English, half in Spanish. The alternative to handbooks will be 250 flash drives right protected in English and Spanish. The information is free and can be shared. The goal is this will serve as a decision managing tool and a reliable source to increase vaccination rates. It will also include recognizable names in the community. A land line has been set up in the BOH office dedicated to EVC. Archipelago Strategic Group (ASG) will be checking it daily and provide answers, make call backs and appointments. The campaign will be in 3 cycles. During the first state they will be knocking on doors, making introductions, and gathering information from interested businesses. For the second stage they will be asking if this was helpful? Is there something we missed that could be helpful? And did anything learned will contribute to increasing your vaccination rate? The third stage will look for changes, attendance, and issues due to COVID. Did they use any grants we didn't provide or were they able to use any provided locally? The Mayor and Mr. Gonsalves are working on creating a vaccine incentive for businesses using ARPA funds. They will be working with staff on their vaccination status and would need to proof to the city that they have a 50-100% vaccination rate. They will also work with the Chamber of Commerce to incentivize those businesses to get their numbers up and reward those that have already done so. The Mayor will look at the numbers and allocate the funds. The city is discussing putting together a COVID recovery survey with the help of state agency Health Resources In Action (HRIA). Businesses will be asked how the pandemic has affected them and what can the city do to help them recover? How it affects local economy, blight vacant and shuttered businesses, unemployment impact and allocation of recovery funds. Unemployment leads to blighted and vacant buildings and shuttered businesses. Mr. Gonsalves believes studying the impact of the pandemic and allocation of funds is worth exploring. This can be tied to the vaccine incentive. It is a good opportunity to do this since we are already out in the community. This is not being done by any other surrounding community. The material, idea and distribution are completely novel.

The city of Cambridge reached out to ASG to use Holyoke as reference model to inform the decisions they are making.

ASG, a consulting outreach firm, is contracted with the city. The workers hired as vaccine ambassadors go knocking on doors on behalf of the BOH. They have a set of questions with 1-5 rating on how the experiences went. The information and contacts are reported to Mr. Gonsalves and constantly updated. As more information is gathered, businesses with a high vaccination rate or that have improved will be rewarded with a media spot as free publicity. ASG is traveling the main quarters in the city where there is a high concentration of businesses. These include Main, Maple, High, and South Streets. Churches and manufacturing companies will also be visited. This is expected to run until March 10, 2022. ASG also sets up a table during Saturday pop-up clinics at the Holyoke Mall. They will also be going to Key Foods Supermarket, One Holyoke and both Stop & Shops.

Ms. Mertes asked why individuals that previously choose to not be vaccinated are now deciding to do so? Dr. Del Pilar said it goes from one spectrum to the other. Some are waiting for the full FDA approval; others have family members that got seriously sick from COVID or have medical conditions. Others want to get on with their lives. He's seen unvaccinated patients that want to get vaccinated after being hospitalized. They are also dealing with a lot of misinformation. Mrs. Schaier spoke to the hospitals and a lot of people are only on their first two doses and have not received their boosters yet. A lot of the data is missing from the Massachusetts Immunization Information System (MIIS) on vaccination status.

Booster Chart Rates Update from the state as of 1/18/2022. 50.4% of eligible individuals have received booster. The average for vaccine equity initiative communities is 47.6%. Holyoke is above average at 50.4%. The state-wide average including the vaccine equity initiative communities 57.2%. Non-vaccine equity communities average is 61.1%. When considering the total vaccinated population regardless of individual's age eligibility or date of booster vaccination rates decrease by 7%. Residents can take advantage of the many clinics taking place throughout the city.

FY 2023 Budget is due on February 18, 2022. Mr. Gonsalves does not anticipate large changes to the department's budget. He will budget for a new permitting software system. The current contract with GEOTMS has expired and no updates or technical support are being provided. Whalley has been helping in the meantime. He will budget in for Chameleon Software for the Animal Control Officer and an increase in overtime. Mass General Hospital is still interested in continuing their research in the city. A few thousand dollars will be budgeted for supplies. They will employ a researcher employed to be in the office as needed.

The Mayor opened up a couple of shelters at the Masonic Lodge in the last few weeks due to extreme cold weather conditions. They received an outpouring of support, and a lot of donations. The shelter is run with emergency funding. Capacity has not been set yet, but 27 individuals showed up. More than half were new. Personnel to help with recovery were present. A few individuals were placed in treatment recovery. He might open an additional one this weekend. The city wants to have at minimum a pop-up shelter that would be operated by an outside entity on a regular basis. Funding sources are being looked at. This will be more sustainable than having the city staff their own shelter. Providence Ministries might open an additional shelter this weekend.

COVID-19 Updates. The numbers reported to Mrs. Schaier from the hospital have also gone down. This is believed to be because of the availability of at-home rapid tests. Cynthia Carbone, HPS had 1,509 cases since August 2021. Cases seem to be increasing due to the at-home rapid tests. Families are calling these results in. The city is still using the Robo-Calls. The system reminds individuals there was a positive COVID case connected to that phone. They are recommended to isolate for 5 days and speak to their close contact. The Chicopee Health Department public health nurse came in and shadowed Mrs. Schaier. She was surprised how the HBOH is working in the pandemic. There are many clinics throughout the city and residents should take advantage of them.


Average daily incidence rates are as follow; 2/3/22 is 150.8, 2-week case count is 858. 2/27/22 is 253.3, the 2-week is 1,441. 1/20/22, is 376.8, the 2-week is 2,144. He believes the reduction in numbers is in part due to the availability of the at-home rapid tests. Some people do not report the positive results and others that are positive do not get the PCR test. According to state instructions reporting is not necessary. That section of reporting is being lost and data is not being accounted for. There is a general reduction in numbers and transmission and thinks things are getting better. HPS switched to the new DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) system. After administering a rapid test contact tracing is waved. The school's focus is on asymptomatic individuals and at-home rapid tests are distributed to those who test positive. They will receive 1 kit with 2 tests every two weeks. The city purchased a pallet of 7,500 at-home test kits for \$76,000 with 2 tests per box. These will be allocated to schools, the community, and local agencies. They are free or residents can get them thru the pharmacies. Health insurance companies are required to 12

During last meeting the Board agreed to review the numbers monthly and determine how to move forward with the mask mandate. Dr. Del Pilar feels is reasonable to keep the mandate effective for a couple more weeks especially with the highly infectious Delta variant. There is still a large at-risk unvaccinated population. It could be possible that by next meeting the mandate can be reinstated as an advisory. The public should still be encouraged to continue wearing their masks since we are still in flu and RSP season. Mrs. Mertes and Ms. Hyry-Dermith agree to keep the current mandate.

The 2022 St. Patrick's Parade is in March. There will be a vaccine clinic at the parade. Springfield's mandate is effective until March 3, 2022. Westfield is considering rescinding theirs.

Next BOH Meeting will be scheduled for March 3, 2022. Mrs. Mertes adjourned meeting at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Dalila Hyry-Dermith, Clerk

Holyoke Board of Health  
Monday, March 1, 2022, at 6:30 P.M.  
Holyoke, MA 01040  
ZOOM  
**Meeting Minutes**

**RECEIVED**

**MAY 31 2022**

Attendance: Patricia A. Mertes, Chair  
Dalila Hyry-Dermith, Clerk  
Sean Gonsalves, RS, Health Director  
Deborah Schaier, PHN  
Beatriz Colon, Head Clerk

**Holyoke City Clerk's  
Holyoke, MA**

Ms. Patricia A. Mertes, Chair called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. Seconded by Ms. Hyry-Dermith. Dr. Esteban A. Del Pilar-Morales, MD, was absent.

The floor was open for comments or questions from the audience. No public comments were made.

COVID Update-Case count is less than a tenth from the end of January 2022. Average daily incident rate was about 370. This is the highest it's ever been. Now is about 32. There's been a regular reduction in the state and hospitals. Massachusetts has changed the way data is recorded. Hospitalizations are no longer the base. Now they are able to track hospitalizations specifically due to COVID-19. Deaths have also gone down considerably. About 7-10 days ago most of the country was considered at high risk but the CDC has revised the risk and updated their metrics. Previously the focus was to stop the spread, now is on minimizing the impact of severe COVID illnesses on health and society. The shift was done due to the high rate of vaccination in the population, the availability of boosters and booster coverage among the high-risk population, and the high rates of infection induced protection in the unvaccinated. In the vaccinated population the rate is sufficient to make these changes. About 30% of the U.S. population is considered high risk. Massachusetts is not at high risk. Hampden and Hampshire County are in the low risk category. The CDC lifted the requirement to use masks on school buses and vans as of February 25, 2022. DPH issued an advisory on face coverings today. It's not necessary for the majority Holyoke residents to wear a mask. 67.2% of Holyoke's population over the age of five are fully vaccinated and 78% have at least one dose. That's 2/3 of the population fully vaccinated. At least 50% have received their booster and another 15% are almost fully vaccinated. That's 90% of Massachusetts almost fully vaccinated. After considering all the information along with CDC and DPH's guidance, Mr. Gonsalves recommended rescinding mandate. Dr. Del Pilar was absent but thinks we should move to an advisory based on present the information. At high-risk patients should follow the advisory.

Ms. Hyry-Dermith made a motion to rescind the mask mandate to an advisory. Individuals at high risk, the immunocompromised, those with a weak immune system and the unvaccinated should continue to wear a mask. Ms. Mertes seconded. All in favor. This is to be in effect immediately.

Stop the Spread Testing sites will close by the end of March 2022. The high-volume testing data will be lost. Considering the level of treatment and variability in infection the CDC thinks that metric is not effective anymore. The new criteria used will be new hospital admittance with confirmed cases per 100,000 and the percentage of inpatient beds occupied with COVID patients. The state will change its message to emphasize

vaccination. The impact is being mitigated with availability of new treatments and access to vaccination. Mrs. Schaier's correspondence with HMC has decreased. The HPS nurse reported having flu cases. Mrs. Schaier received about 11 flu cases and one case of Flurona; Flu & Corona. She wants residents to remain cautious, especially the unvaccinated and the immunocompromised. People need to stay updated with their vaccines. HPS collected 2,000 google survey polls about wearing masks from staff and parents. They will present the data to the School Committee and reach a conclusion by March 7, 2022. Next year schools should resume regular operations. Wearing masks in school buses is up to the School Department and each district. Springfield was hit hard by the pandemic and will wait to make a decision. There are new oral and nasal therapies for treating COVID. There's also monoclonal antibodies and other mitigating treatments.

Harvard Mass General Hospital Global Health Initiative requested an extension as agents of the Board to continue data collection of the project until May 31, 2022. The same staff will continue their work. Ms. Mertes made a motion to accept extension. Seconded by Ms. Hyry-Dermith. The data is received from the state, Maven, testing sites and other sources. They will organize the information and make it comprehensive. They will try to get a paper published with the data.

Sarah McColgan, MHOA Tobacco Control and KC Dufour, MHOA Tobacco Control continue to work with the compliance grant. These grants help communities bring tobacco vendors up to date and in compliance with changes in tobacco laws. Ms. Dufour did compliance checks for underage sales with a MHOA employee. The 20-year-old inspector went into the business attempting to purchase a box of Marlboro Reds. At each transaction buyers are to be carded. If carded and person is under 21 the sale should be refused. If so, the establishment passes inspection. If they accept a verbal disclosure of age instead of an ID or sell without carding, they are in violation of state law. Twelve of these businesses were found in violation. MHOA has 15 days after inspections to notices. Those establishment received a hand delivered letter with a \$1,000.00 fine. All sales are recorded with date, time and product purchased. This information is passed to the BOH. The spread sheet was sent to the Commissioners. To pass inspection the business has to refuse the sale. They have 7 days to appeal the fines and can appear at the next Board meeting. With this level of organized enforcement, Mr. Gonsalves felt doing a uniform \$1,000.00 fine was sufficient. Suspensions were not done because of the ongoing hardships many establishments are experiencing with lack of staff. Ms. Hyry-Dermith asked if those that passed inspection are aware of it? They were all aware of it and these businesses talk to each other. Inspections were very thorough. The maximum fine is \$1,000.00 for a first offense and up to a 3-day suspension. The second fine will be \$2,000 and a longer suspension. The third fee is higher and a suspension of up to 30 days. Their ability to sell tobacco can also be rescinded. This is within a 36 months window. The first round of inspections was simple. They received letters to expect inspections within the next year. About 30 letters were sent. In addition to the city's permit they need to have about 4 permits from the state before beginning sales.

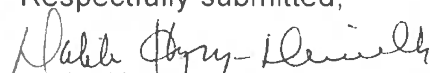
Mrs. Schaier got her ServSafe Food Manager Certification and will be helping with food inspections.

The 2022 St. Patricks Parade/Road Race will be March 19 & 20, 2022. The event is expected to be well attended.

Next meeting is scheduled for April 5, 2022.

Meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Dalila Hyry-Dermith, Clerk