

**Hamilton County General Health District  
REGULAR MEETING – BOARD OF HEALTH  
September 13, 2021 – 4 p.m.  
Minutes**

**1. Call to Order**

At 4 p.m., Mark A. Rippe, President, called to order the regular session of the Board of Health of Hamilton County General Health District followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Roll Call of Members**

Members Present: Mark A. Rippe, President  
Elizabeth A. Kelly M.D., Vice President  
James Brett  
Dan Meloy  
Tracey A. Puthoff, Esq.

District Staff Present: Greg Kesterman, Health Commissioner  
Dr. Jennifer Mooney, Assistant Health Commissioner  
Craig Davidson, Assistant Health Commissioner  
Dr. Steve Feagins, Medical Director  
Nee Fong Chin, Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney

Guests: David Heller, Amanda Mason

**3. Clean Kitchen Awards**

Craig Davidson read the list of six Clean Kitchen Award recipients and congratulated them for their efforts to maintain a high level of sanitation and staff education. David Heller and Amanda Mason from Fountains Transitional Care were present to receive their award.

**4. Approval of Minutes**

**Mr. Brett** moved to approve the minutes from the August 9, 2021 Board of Health meeting.  
**Dr. Kelly** seconded the motion.  
**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

**5. Public Comment: None.**

**6. Health Commissioner's Report**

Commissioner Kesterman reported there are 8,100 active COVID-19 cases in our community; up 2,000 since we last met. Healthcare staff continue to be stressed by the pandemic workload. Region 6 has 521 confirmed COVID-19 positive hospitalizations, of which 145 are in the ICU and 115 are on ventilators. Ms. Puthoff asked what the Region 6 makeup is. Commissioner Kesterman explained it is 24 hospitals in Southwest Ohio. Mr. Rippe asked how many ICU beds are in the region. Dr. Feagins explained that the number of ICU beds vary depending on each facility's staffing. Presently, 20 percent of ICU beds are occupied by COVID-19 patients. Hospitals are load sharing but transferring COVID-19 patients is dangerous. Only the highest risk patients are transferred.

The majority of hospitalizations are age 50 and older. Commissioner Kesterman explained the CDC's new method of calculation for COVID-19 spread. Our community has 346 cases per 100,000 and 11.68 percent positivity.

With the FDA approval of Pfizer's vaccine for 16 years old and up, we were expecting to see an increase in the vaccination rate, but that did not happen. The vaccination rate for ages 12 and up has reached 65 percent for Hamilton County. The 50 and older age group has exceeded 70 percent. HCPH staff are dedicated to the vaccine effort and continue to put in the work. Breakthrough cases from January 1, 2021, to date are 2.87 percent. There will be more community messaging regarding the efficacy of vaccines combined with masking, hand washing, and social distancing. President Biden's plan includes all federal employees must be vaccinated and employers over 100 employees must mandate vaccines. There is no OSHA information available yet and we are still learning what impact this new requirement may have on HCPH. Booster shots are projected for September 20, but contingent upon FDA and CDC approvals. The President plans to keep schools open with masking and social distancing. Quality tests are accessible in urban areas, but not as much in rural areas. HCPH is giving \$100 gift cards for first doses paid for by an Ohio grant to help increase vaccination rates—there are approximately \$650,000 in funds dedicated at HCPH for this program. Additional funding from the State may be available. Emergency preparedness planning and vaccination work is expected to continue for years. To help manage this work long term, HCPH is hiring a Director of Emergency Preparedness. This new position will help the team continue to manage all work areas while maintaining a strong pandemic response. A map of vaccine clinics with walk-in appointments is posted on HCPH's website. Mr. Rippe asked if all clinics have the \$100 gift cards. No, only the HCPH clinics have the gift cards.

HCPH's Facebook account comments were turned off because the agency's posts were providing a means to spread misinformation. Following HCPH's lead, many other health departments are also turning off comments. The Prosecutor's Office was consulted prior to making the change.

HCPH's Harm Reduction staff are moving to a new space located in Over the Rhine at 1130 Main Street. The leased space came fully furnished and HCPH is paying for staff parking. Ms. Puthoff asked how many are moving to the new location? Commissioner Kesterman explained 15 staff initially, but the space has capacity for 28 so there is room to grow.

There is still time for the Board to complete the Strategic Plan Survey. Thanks to those who have completed the survey. Preliminary findings include needs in the areas of team ethnic diversity, meeting the community where they are, additional space, staff retention and pay, and funding diversification. A facilitator from Ohio State University will help lead HCPH through the process.

Ms. Puthoff stated the letter included in the Board packet from Keith Koerner regarding his vaccine experience was so refreshing. Mr. Meloy said many more people likely feel the same way, but just didn't write a letter.

## **Staff Reports**

**(a) Medical Director's Report**

Dr. Steve Feagins Medical Director shared that Ivermectin, used to treat Onchocerciasis (or "river blindness") and other parasites, typically has 3,500 prescriptions a year. In one week in August, there were 88,000 prescriptions. The CDC issued a health advisory regarding inappropriate use for COVID-19 treatment or prevention.

There are over 400 COVID-19 hospitalizations, and the data analytics cannot predict when the surge will peak or by how much. If not using year-to-date numbers, 20 percent of hospitalizations and six percent of ICU patients are unvaccinated, which means double mitigation is necessary to control the spread. Healthcare providers have crisis standards of care in place to protect limited resources.

Dr. Feagins explained the positive cases heat map of the 14-county region. Adams county is one of the highest in the area and the nation. The local hospital opted to not mandate vaccinations. As mentioned earlier this evening, we don't want to transfer COVID-19 patients; however, providers are collaborating on who is taking on new patients. We were contacted by the National Disaster Management System (NDMS) to determine if our area could take patients from Louisiana so we may be taking on patients displaced by the hurricane.

Delta continues to be the predominant strain locally. St. Elizabeth Healthcare's data dashboard helps to visualize breakthrough cases. The September 20 booster start date for the general population is likely to be postponed because there is no precedence with no FDA approval. The vaccine safety data and effectiveness continue to be very good. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) will not approve general public boosters until the initial vaccine is FDA approved. However, immunocompromised and long-term care residents are eligible and have been receiving a third dose of Pfizer or Moderna accordingly. ACIP members emphasized that improving overall vaccination coverage is a "top priority," as a high percentage of hospitalizations are occurring among unvaccinated individuals.

Schools are returning to play. Exercise is good and has been shown to boost immune systems and the effectiveness of the vaccine. Indoor sports likely bear the greatest risk, so schools should encourage a decrease in density and increase in ventilation.

Mr. Rippe asked about the flu status. Dr. Feagins explained providers are seeing the flu in the ER and physician offices. It is not a high number, but it will increase with COVID-19 testing since the symptoms are the same. Mr. Rippe asked if ACE inhibitors prevent COVID-19. Dr. Feagins shared that lots of studies are being done, but they appear to have an added benefit of lowering COVID-19 risks.

The monthly Communicable Diseases Epi report was provided in the Board packet.

**(b) Department of Community Health Services**

Assistant Health Commissioner Dr. Jennifer Mooney reported staff are pivoting back to virtual meetings and are adjusting their plans for the fall. August 31 was Hamilton County overdose awareness day. The WeTHRIVE! program is being restructured and adding two new modules (Resiliency and Mental Health) that will help with health promotion and

education. This program also cross pollinates with HCPH's Harm Reduction work. Disease Prevention team reported 31 vaccinations administered by end of day today compared to the typical two or three vaccines given prior to the \$100 gift card incentives program.

The HIV cases continue to increase in Butler County. HCPH is working closely to be proactive with outreach, and prevention funding is being spent on public education media. The Disease Prevention division is rapidly growing; in the next few months, HCPH will have increased staff by six FTEs.

Mr. Rippe asked if the 126 new HIV cases are in Hamilton County. No, they include the region, which encompasses seven counties.

Dr. Kelly is curious if people are getting vaccinated because of the \$100 gift card, fear of the Delta variant, and/or vaccination being required to get into restaurants, etc. Dr. Mooney will explore why and report back.

Ms. Puthoff asked how the \$100 gift cards are publicized. The local media is providing a great deal of coverage. It is also publicized on HCPH's website and social media accounts.

Dr. Feagins recently heard the estimated cost of a COVID-19 hospitalization (not ICU) is \$50,000. The data came from Delta Airlines, which is self-insured, but Dr. Feagins thinks that number is low.

Mr. Meloy is glad to see the trauma informed governance model being used in the WeTHRIVE program as it has worked well in his community.

Mr. Brett inquired about a regional COVID-19 vaccination extension for employers to September 1. This has not been the case in Hamilton County.

### **(c) Department of Environmental Health Services**

Assistant Health Commissioner Mr. Davidson highlighted that emergency preparedness staff are doing normal work in addition to COVID-19 response. Robin Thomas is the Southwest Ohio Regional Public Health Coordinator. A workshop was held recently for grantees of federal and hospital preparedness funds to collaborate in assessing risks and opportunities with respect to developing alignment across the regional and jurisdiction-specific emergency preparedness training and exercise plans. It was a good exercise and common themes included flooding, severe weather, the need to improve equipment inventory and tracking, and keeping staff trained on how to use it. They also discussed continuity of operations training, staffing, and scheduling. Mr. Davidson emphasized the need to staff up with new opportunities and ensuring bench strength is an important factor. The workshop fills a deliverable requirement for the grants. A regional preparedness plan will be prepared, and each local health department will use that to prepare individual plans.

The mosquito surveillance season will be wrapping up soon. The first positive trap occurred in August. There were over 700 insects trapped and only one positive pool was identified in Columbia Township. HCPH contacted the township and provided public education within a ½ mile radius of the positive pool.

Forest Park Fire Department filed a complaint that resulted in a condemnation. The resident was transported to the hospital for evaluation. More details are in the Board packet.

**7. Finances**

The August 2021 Disbursement Reports are included in the Board packet.

**Dr. Kelly** moved to approve the monthly disbursements.

**Ms. Puthoff** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

**8. Unfinished Business: None.**

**9. New Business**

Mr. Rippe shared a comment he received on what a great job Tucker Stone, Environment Health Supervisor, does.

**10. Executive Session**

**Ms. Puthoff** moved to go to Executive Session to discuss pending litigation matters at 5:08 p.m.

**Mr. Brett** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

**Mr. Brett** moved to end Executive Session at 5:26 p.m.

**Ms. Puthoff** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

**11. Adjournment**

**Ms. Puthoff** moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:27 p.m.

**Dr. Kelly** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

Next Board of Health meeting: October 11, 2021.

  
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Mark A. Rippe, President

  
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Greg Kesterman, Secretary  
Health Commissioner

