

Montgomery County Office of Public Health
Montgomery County Board of Health Meeting

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

1430 DeKalb St. Norristown, PA 19404-0311

Wednesday, May 4, 2022, 10 a.m.

Virtual meeting platform: Zoom webinar and Facebook Live Stream

Board of Health (BOH) Members

Michael B. Laign, Chair

Francis Jeyaraj, MD

Steve Katz

Martin Trichtinger, MD

Barbara A. Wadsworth, DNP

Montgomery County Office of Public Health (OPH)

Christina N. Miller, Health Administrator

Janet Panning, Interim Deputy Administrator

Feba Cheriyen, Epidemiologist Research Associate

Ruth Cole, Director, Clinical Services (CS)

David Genova, Director, Health Promotion (HP)

Pam Lawn, Director, Environmental Field Services (EFS)

Richard Lorraine, MD, Medical Director

Michel Masters, Director, Communicable Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Julia Picchioni, Intern, Health Promotion

Kyle Schmeck, Director, Water Quality Management (WQM)

Toyca Williams, Health Program Office Coordinator

Megan Young, Coordinator, Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP)

Health and Human Services (HHS)

Brandon Alexander, Digital Media Coordinator, Office of Community Information & Education

Denise Wallin, Deputy Health Administrator

Montgomery County

Lauren Hughes, Senior Assistant Solicitor, Solicitor's Office

Meeting Minutes

Welcome/Chairman's Remarks

Mr. Laign called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. He welcomed all in attendance. He acknowledged Dr. Francis Jeyaraj's recent recognition. On May 5, the North Penn Knights of Honor will celebrate Dr. Jeyaraj for making significant contributions to the North Penn School District, the community and the medical profession.

The minutes for Feb. 2 meeting were approved.

Motion: Mr. Katz made a motion to approve the Feb. 2 minutes with a second by Dr. Jeyaraj. The motion passed.

Health Administrator's Report

Ms. Miller asked that the record reflect a written public comment from J. Zimmerman MD. Dr. Zimmerman asks the Office of Public Health to review its recommendations for mask guidance, filtration and ventilation guidance for K-12 schools and other mitigation strategies for schools. The board liaison shared the public comments with the Board of Health members, the health administrator and the medical director when received by e-mail on May 3.

Ms. Miller welcomed all in attendance and then provided an update on OPH COVID-19 response. She said a recent uptick in cases is to be expected following Spring Break activities and social gatherings. She explained that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is transitioning to a community level framework – low, medium, high -- to measure community risk levels. The old method evaluated positivity and incidence rates. The new framework will consider case or incidence rate, hospital admission rate, and the percentage of inpatient bed utilization. Additionally, OPH is evaluating its operations and making adjustments to adequately respond to a potential surge in the fall and winter months. There will more opportunities to educate residents on how to live with COVID-19. OPH is assessing how to fill the gaps in other public health program that have been paused during COVID-19. The pandemic has shed a bright light on the weaknesses in our public health infrastructure, and investment in public health is needed to adequately address them.

COVID-19 Transitions: Vaccine and Testing Landscape

Ms. Young gave an update on the county's COVID-19 testing and vaccination clinics. Currently, OPH is managing six testing sites and four vaccination clinics. Plans are underway to close the Green Lane testing site at the end of May and move the Norristown testing site from the lot of the Norristown Regional Medical Center. Between July 2020 and April 2022, the county has tested 169,404 individuals. As expected testing spiked during the holiday/New Year surge and then took a nosedive the latter part of January. The Norristown and Ardmore sites have higher utilization than the other sites. She also explained that OPH is shifting from a mass vaccination model to a community health center model. By June, all vaccine clinics will operate out of the OPH public health centers in Norristown, Pottstown, and Willow Grove. The four sites offer various morning and evening hours. As of April 27, the county has vaccinated 222,686 individuals. Mr. Katz expressed concern about the expiration of vaccine inventory. Ms. Cole shared that vaccine is sometimes transferred to other providers. Dr. Jeyaraj said he was concerned that the distribution of other vaccines needed by children has declined. Ms. Cole said the immunization clinics are operating in Norristown and Pottstown. Ms. Young also shared some next steps in OPH planning that include supporting fall surge preparations, enhancing cross departmental planning with Department of Public Safety and increasing the recruitment and retention of Medical Reserve Corps volunteers.

COVID-19 Transitions: Case Investigation, Contact Tracing and Outbreak Management

Ms. Masters explained that efforts are underway to redefine OPH's response to COVID-19 outbreaks. Transitions include moving away from universal case investigation or contact tracing by the community based organizations, a move toward general isolation and quarantine requirements and refocusing on investigation of those hospitalized or die from COVID-19. What constitutes an outbreak has been redefined. If there is an outbreak, mitigation strategies will be based on the needs of that particular facility. Testing will be tailored toward that setting and recommendations will be made. Ms. Masters shared how these changes would affect a response to a non-COVID-19 disease such as the flu, pertussis, and mumps. For example, all cases of pertussis and mumps would be investigated; however only hospitalization or expired cases of influenza are investigated. She concluded that some great partnerships were created with community based organizations and OPH is assessing how to engage these valued resources during and after these transitions.

COVID-19 Transitions: Pandemic Data Analytics

Ms. Cheriyan provided pandemic data analytics. She highlighted the progression of the pandemic, with the first COVID-19 case identified on March 7, 2020, discussed changes to the data metrics for measuring transmission and provided details on the Omicron variants. As of May 4, there have been a total of 156,010 cases of COVID-19 in Montgomery County and 2,324 deaths. Under the new CDC framework for community transmission, Montgomery County has been at the low level for nine weeks. She said case rates may seem high, but severity of disease is low.

Medical Director's Report: To Boost or Not to Boost -- That is the Question

Dr. Lorraine explained who is eligible for the three COVID-19 boosters. Eligibility is based on age and when you completed your primary series. All vaccines given should be mRNA vaccines. He explained that boosters increase protection against SARS-CoV-2 and if you are eligible for the booster, you should get it. In March, the CDC recommended that certain groups of people may get a second booster. Each individual must evaluate own circumstances to determine if a second booster is needed, based on the risks and benefits the vaccine may provide. He encouraged everyone to discuss the matter with his or her primary care physician.

New Business-- None

Motion: Mr. Katz motioned to adjourn the meeting, with a second by Ms. Wadsworth. Motion passed and meeting adjourned at 11:49 a.m.

The next BOH meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 7, 10 a.m.