

BOARD OF HEALTH COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
December 27, 2021, 7:30 pm
Conducted Remotely

Board members present: Chairperson Noel Chavez, Suzanne Feeney, Wynne Lacey, Abigail Silva

Board members not present: Judy Ann Carter, Jennifer Fritz

Trustee liaison not present: Susan Buchanan

Staff liaisons present: Theresa Chapple-McGruder, Cindy Hansen, Sara Semelka

1) Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Chavez at 7:30 pm.

2) Agenda Approval: A motion was made and seconded to approve the agenda as presented.

3) Public Comment: There were no public comments.

4) New Business:

COVID-19 Outbreak Mitigations

Dr. Chapple reported that COVID in the community went from 57 cases three weeks ago to 333 cases last week. We know these numbers are underestimates, as doctors are telling families not to test and to just stay home, and people are testing at home and not getting an official test to be counted. We expect cases to continue increasing exponentially so we want to discuss mitigations and plan for the winter surge.

As of January 3rd, the City of Chicago and Cook County are going to a vaccinated-only protocol for spas, gyms, restaurants, movie theaters, and indoor eating. There are four other health departments in Cook County—Evanston, Oak Park, Stickney, and Skokie, who is joining January 10th.

The question is should Oak Park join the rest of the county? A downside would be that we are a highly vaccinated community and we are seeing vaccinated people also getting infected, so a vaccine mandate can give a false sense of security. An upside is that Oak Park should not be a safe haven for unvaccinated people, which would lead to increased rates in our community. The job of the health department is not just to protect the health of residents, but also those who work and play here. For that reason, Dr. Chapple believes it makes sense to join the rest of the county in this protocol.

Dr. Chapple is meeting with the business community tomorrow to discuss the mitigations we determine are appropriate tonight. She also met with the schools to discuss events with spectators and concession stands. The lower level schools have strong mitigations and the high school does not so it was beneficial for D200 to learn from D97 and they will continue those conversations. Chairperson Chavez asked about

early childhood education and childcare. Dr. Chapple responded that they are also excluded from Chicago's and Cook County's mandate.

Board member Lacey asked if those under age five would be subject to the mandate. Dr. Chapple said Chicago and Cook County have written theirs to be age five or older, so it wouldn't apply to those under five. Also if you're over 16, you must have an ID to match the vaccination card, which presents some equity concerns. They also wrote theirs for people coming in and not for people who work there, so there are conversations to have with businesses about what they can have in place so both employees and patrons are protected.

Board member Lacey said she is not vaccinated and she volunteers at the high school concession stand and wants to know how you would work with that. Dr. Chapple responded that we may need to develop with different distinctions for employees, volunteers, or spectators, though it is important to go back to the goal, which gets chipped away each time exceptions are put into place.

Board member Lacey asked if the goal is reduced rates or a specific number. Dr. Chapple said the goal right now is to slow the spread. The ultimate goal is to go back to low and moderate transmissions. We had a full summer without mitigations and with low spread. Until then, the goal is to slow transmission so we have less people sick.

Many people are also impacted now by a testing shortage. They're waiting in lines for hours and results are taking five days to come back. This a clear result of the health care system being overrun and not able to keep up with the exposure. A virus takes over every part of health care, not just deaths and hospitalizations. If you can't see your pediatrician because they're dealing with so many COVID cases, then your child is impacted. Slowing the spread is essential to keeping our infrastructure at all levels.

Board member Feeney agrees that it makes sense to do something like this short-term to keep our infrastructure in place and schools open. The goal is to look incrementally each week and then tailor back mitigations so they're not lasting forever.

Board member Lacey said the Village website says all of the people testing positive are vaccinated, so she questions the purpose of targeting unvaccinated people—is that just the easiest way to segregate? Dr. Chapple responded that the CDC said today that vaccinated people who are exposed should quarantine for five days and boosted people should not. With that CDC guidance, now local health departments can develop mitigations for vaccinated and boosted people.

Dr. Chapple thinks we also need a protocol and should consider testing for large events. This can provide a sense of security in knowing you can attend a large event because there is testing protocol in place.

Board member Lacey said her kids at the high school are wrestlers and they test every other day. She thinks it seems very easy for them and wants to know what that would

look like for you to do that. Dr. Chapple responded that testing is extremely labor intensive and there is a shortage. If supplies will be available in January as President Biden has said, we would need to work with large venues to ensure they have tests or that they get the word out that people have to test before they come. The United Center doesn't do testing on-site; you bring a copy of your negative test to get in. So that could be another way where the onus is not on the facility or on public health.

Last spring we brought our mobile van to the Frank Lloyd Wright house walk and we tested everyone in order for homeowners to feel comfortable knowing that uninfected people were walking through their homes. So there is an opportunity for events to work with the health department but we do not have the capacity to test for every event. Businesses, patrons, and the health department must work together to make it work.

Chairperson Chavez inquired about the event size. Dr. Chapple responded that it would be either a specific number or an inability to social distance. If you meet either, then you would need to request testing within a certain amount of time prior to the event.

Chairperson Chavez asked if MRC volunteers could help with testing. Dr. Chapple said we did a testing event for hundreds of people on December 23 with our staff of four. We could have called the MRC or CERT team but we wanted to limit exposure and only have people who were clear in infection control measures. Dr. Chapple is thinking hard about how do we do the work we need to do while protecting our team and volunteers. Chairperson Chavez suggested that we speak with clinician Jennifer Fritz.

If the board does not object, Dr. Chapple would like to pursue the Chicago's and Cook County's vaccination mandate for activities, including extra-curricular and school events. Board member Silva agrees and supports us following suit with the city and county. Regarding guidance on large gatherings, she agrees and thinks it entails more thinking and she knows guidance would be appreciated by the community. Board member Feeney also supports Dr. Chapple's recommendations.

Board member Lacey said the segregation and discrimination to the unvaccinated is so heightened that when we decide as a city to come back together, she'd like to be a part of the healing discussions because this will cause more stress to people like her.

A motion was made for Oak Park to join the City of Chicago and Cook County in this protocol. Board member Lacey objected but understands it will be done. The motion was seconded and approved.

Dr. Chapple will meet with the schools again because the CDC released new changes today that fully vaccinated but not boosted people must quarantine for five days. It will be disappointing for the 4,000 children who were vaccinated and will now have to quarantine again. 12 to 15-year-olds are ineligible for boosters and their immunity is waning so this will impact them. It will also impact operations at the health department because many people are going to want boosters which will take us away from other work we need to be doing.

Board member Silva asked if the boosted population is being tracked. Dr. Chapple replied that is a major concern because we did not track for a few weeks in August because there was no way to enter who is boosted in the database. The CDC approved boosters for immunocompromised and those 65 and over for Pfizer in August, but the data systems weren't updated immediately. So we have not reported our percent boosted because we don't have a clear number. Fortunately, that was only Pfizer and for certain groups, so it is a small number, but still is a problem we face.

The CDC also released today that if you have COVID and are asymptomatic, you only have to isolate for five days instead of 10. This will be challenging for us to determine whether someone has symptoms. It would have made sense for the CDC to say you can come out of isolation after five days with a negative antigen test, to give an indication of how infectious that person is and the risk they pose to others. So this may be a time where we need to go above what the CDC says, which we can do.