

BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEETING
Meeting Minutes for May 10, 2022

Members Present:

James Curran, M.D., M.P.H., Chair
John Hauptert, F.A.C.H.E., Vice Chair
Mitch Rodriguez, M.D., Secretary
Major General Thomas M. Carden, Jr.
Kathryn Cheek, M.D., F.A.A.P.
Robert Cowles III, M.D., F.A.C.S
Cynthia A. Mercer, M.D.
Sangmin Ryan Shin, M.D., M.A., F.A.A.O.S.
Tamica Valliere-White, M.D., F.A.C.S

Members Absent:

The Board of Public Health held its monthly meeting on May 10, 2022. The meeting was virtual and was led by Chairman James Curran, M.D. An agenda and a list of attendees are attached hereto and made official parts of these minutes.

I. & II. Call to Order and Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order at 1:08 p.m. by Dr. Curran, following a roll call by Dr. Mitch Rodriguez, all members were present.

III. Approval/Adoption of Minutes:

Dr. Rodriguez presented the minutes of the April 12, 2022, board meeting for discussion and approval. Dr. Mercer asked about information that was going to be sent to the Board following last month's meeting. Commissioner Toomey confirmed the information would be sent soon. The minutes passed unanimously.

IV. New Business:

- A. Epidemiology Updates –Pediatric Hepatitis and Covid-19 - Cherie L. Drenzek, D.V.M., M.S. COVID-19 (5/10/22)
- COVID cases have doubled over the last two weeks as the BA.2.12.1 subvariant spreads (40% of all circulating viruses). In Georgia, case numbers have increased by 65% in the same time period.
 - 56% of the Georgia population is fully vaccinated and 24% boosted.
 - Most all COVID deaths and hospitalizations have occurred among those un- or under-vaccinated.
 - Last week the US reached the grim milestone of 1,000,000 COVID deaths
 - Vaccination, boosters, surveillance, testing, and traditional mitigation are critical to control this wave and WHEN we face other variants that emerge and result in surges over the next several years.

HEPATITIS OF UNKNOWN ETIOLOGY IN CHILDREN

- In October 2021, nine young children in Alabama were diagnosed with severe, acute hepatitis of unknown etiology (several of whom needed liver transplants).
- Additional investigation identified a total of 109 children under investigation in 25 states (including several in Georgia) since October 2021, with five deaths.

- 90% of the children were hospitalized, 14% needed transplants, the median age was 2 years. None had hepatitis viruses (A-E). Half of the children had adenovirus type 41 infections, half did not.
- About 300 suspect cases have also been identified in 24 other countries.
- At this time, the cause of hepatitis in these children is still unknown. While adenovirus has been detected in some children, we do not know if it is the cause of the illness.
- Hepatitis remains a very rare illness in young children

COMMENTS:

Commissioner Toomey asked about the role COVID plays on children diagnosed with hepatitis, and how we can ensure a robust surveillance system that is able to pick up these cases in addition to COVID cases.

Dr. Drenzek answered that it can't be ignored that COVID was the prime part of the landscape while this was emerging, and we need to consider that these kids were too young to be vaccinated for COVID, so the infections are not related to COVID vaccination; and not many of them had COVID, so it is not necessarily a co-infection. Also, it was mentioned that during COVID isolation, these children were not exposed to the typical adenovirus and reacted in a different way, but in fact it is really a different virus. Through epidemiology investigation we are still trying to see what the contributing factors are.

Dr. Cheek thanked Dr. Drenzek for the update about hepatitis and asked about the new hot spots occurring with the new COVID variant and if the cause has been identified. Dr. Drenzek replied that when we see hot spots and increases of the variant, certainly vaccination levels make a difference, most of the hot spots identified happened in the northeast part of the U.S. where they find a susceptible population. The infection rate could be higher since the home testing is widely available, and this information is underreported. The new variants are more transmissible than before.

B. Covid Testing Update – David Newton, Dr.PH(c), M.P.H., N.R.P.

SPOC Sites - April/May 2022 -132 SPOC sites

- 47 health department sites
- 85 contractor run sites

Over-the-Counter Test Kits

- 10,368 tests distributed directly from state to four county health departments
- 48,454 tests distributed to health districts
 - Will be used for distribution to county health departments, first responders, vulnerable populations, and other community partners

C. Opioid Overdose Surveillance and the rise of fentanyl – Laura Edison D.V.M., M.P.H.

Rapid Rise of Fentanyl

- 64% of drug overdoses in the U.S. involved a synthetic opioid during 2021
- Fentanyl is 100x more potent than morphine
- From 2019 to 2021 in Georgia:
 - Drug overdose deaths increased by 56% – 2,327 lives lost
 - Fentanyl-involved overdose deaths increased by **218%** –1,248 lives lost

- Fentanyl is cheap and easy to produce, it can be and is found in ANY type of street drug

Rapid Surveillance and Response

- DPH Drug Surveillance Unit monitors emergency department visits and EMS trip reports (timely), and death certificates (reporting lag) for clusters of overdoses
- If data is concerning, local partners are notified including law enforcement, the healthcare community, harm reduction, and more

Current Situation

- From mid-February through mid-March suspect overdose emergency department visits increased 364% compared to the previous 30-day period
- 12 confirmed cases in Valdosta (8-1), Cobb (3-1), and Athens (10-0) districts
 - Only areas with known EDs doing fentanyl tox screens
- 1 confirmed OD death involving a patient who snorted cocaine but tested positive for fentanyl
 - 19 suspect OD deaths involving fentanyl, stimulants, and Xylazine
- Multiple suspect cases of stimulants, heroin and pills laced with fentanyl in the past two weeks

Next Steps

- Continue monitoring data, improve action from notifications
- Educate the public about
 - The dangers of fentanyl and street drugs
<https://www.fentanylawarenessday.org>
 - Get naloxone in more hands
 - Medical amnesty
 - Georgia Crisis & Access Line 1-800-715-4225
- Fentanyl test strips
- Prevention, treatment, support recovery, and so much more

COMMENTS:

Dr. Curran thanked Dr. Edison for the presentation and asked how to get the fentanyl strips to the right hands. Dr. Edison informed that is the same challenge with Naloxone. Some States had pilot programs with some success trying to get them to harm reduction partners, or areas where drug users hang out.

Dr. Mercer asked how the strips work and what is the level of detection they have. Dr. Edison said that strips are not perfect to detect all drugs, even though they aren't perfect, they are effective.

Dr. Toomey informed the Board that there is a standing order for Naloxone for anyone who needs it in Georgia, unfortunately the cost is very high. Dr. Toomey also commented that the opioid settlement funds that will be allocated will go to first responders and EMS providers but not necessarily into the hands of the people who, maybe, are at most risk in the community.

V. Board Comments

Dr. Toomey remarked that she is really pleased that today's meeting covered an array of topics in addition to COVID, refocusing and readdressing public health issues, in many circumstances, the outcome of COVID cases. Board members are encouraged to suggest health topics that they would like to be presented in upcoming meetings. Dr. Toomey also informed the Board that DPH will be moving to the Twin Towers in less than a year.

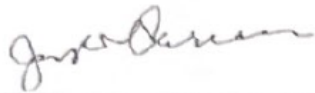
Dr. Cowles approached Dr. Toomey before the meeting to raise the concern of severe supply chain issues affecting consumables and medical supplies, some hospitals suspended elective surgeries, there is shortage of antibodies, IV fluids and other kinds of equipment. Unfortunately, those issues can't be addressed in Public Health, but we can use our forum to alert the public and policy makers of this urgent problem.

Dr. Curran inquired about the change in lead poisoning guidelines. Megan Andrews informed that the Governor just signed the bill that lowers the blood level in children to allow Public Health intervention down to 3.5, which is what CDC recommends. The law also secures funding in the budget for \$1.8 million to hire lead inspectors at the local level. This bill has not been signed by the Governor yet.

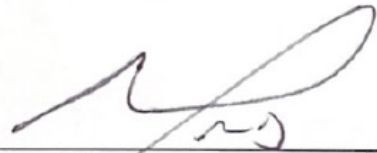
VI. Adjournment:

There being no further business to be brought before the board, Dr. Curran motioned for adjournment of the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. Dr. Curran adjourned the meeting at 2:04 p.m.

THESE MINUTES ARE HEREBY APPROVED AND ADOPTED THIS THE 10th DAY OF MAY 2022.



James Curran, M.D.
Chair



Misael Rodriguez, M.D.
Secretary

Official Attachments:

1. List of Attendees
2. Agenda

May 10, 2022
Board of Public Health Meeting Attendees

Board Members

James Curran, M.D., M.P.H., Chair
John Hauptert, F.A.C.H.E., Vice Chair
Mitch Rodriguez, M.D., Secretary
Major General Thomas M. Carden, Jr.
Kathryn Cheek, M.D., F.A.A.P.
Robert Cowles III, M.D., F.A.C.S
Cynthia A. Mercer, M.D
Sangmin Ryan Shin, M.D., M.A., F.A.A.O.S.
Tamica Valliere-White, M.D., F.A.C.S

Attendees

Public virtual meeting.