

BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEETING
Meeting Minutes for November 14, 2023

Members Present:

James Curran, M.D., M.P.H., Chair
Mitch Rodriguez, M.D., Secretary
Cynthia A. Mercer, M.D.
Sangmin Ryan Shin, M.D., M.A., F.A.A.O.S.
Kathryn Cheek, M.D., F.A.A.P.
Major General Thomas M. Carden, Jr.
Mychal Walker Sr., C.L.T.C., F.R.C.

Members Absent:

John Hauptert, F.A.C.H.E., Vice Chair
Tai Valliere-White, M.D., F.A.C.S.

The Board of Public Health held its monthly meeting on November 14, 2023. The meeting was virtual and led by Dr. James Curran. The list of attendees is attached hereto and made an official part of these minutes.

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

The meeting was called to order at 1:02 p.m. by Dr. Curran, following a roll call led by Dr. Rodriguez, in conformity the members absent were Mr. Hauptert and Dr. Valliere-White.

III. Approval/Adoption of Minutes:

Dr. Rodriguez presented the board meeting minutes of September 12, 2023, for discussion and approval. There was no discussion. The minutes passed unanimously.

IV. New Business:

A. Opening Remarks - Commissioner Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.

Dr. Toomey's opening remarks covered several key topics. First, there was mention of legislative activities, including a recent hearing on public health programs such as PrEP, HIV, and congenital syphilis. The Commissioner introduced Dr. Stephanie Bialek as the new Medical and Clinical Director, highlighting her extensive experience at the CDC and expressing gratitude for her leadership, especially in laboratory services.

The agenda for the meeting was described as eclectic and action-packed, shaped by feedback from board members. Topics included discussions on vaccinations, trends in respiratory viruses, addressing animal bites, a generous grant from the CDC Foundation for drowning prevention, and updates on the car seat program in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Highway Safety. The Commissioner also touched on the interest from board members, particularly Dr. Mercer and Dr. Cheek, in congenital CMV infection, noting that the advisory committee has spoken, and actions will be taken.

Finally, Dr. Toomey expressed openness to addressing any issues that board members might have before the next meeting in January.

B. Epidemiology Updates – Cherie L. Drenzek, D.V.M., M.S.

Dr. Drenzek provided an epidemiology update on respiratory virus season, emphasizing the unpredictability of infectious diseases. She highlighted the importance of surveillance, including molecular and genomic surveillance, to develop scientifically founded prevention and control strategies. Dr. Drenzek discussed the potential impact of co-circulation of RSV, influenza, and COVID-19, referencing last year's "triple-demic" and CDC's forecast for a moderate respiratory virus season. The need for pan-respiratory virus surveillance was emphasized, with a focus on emergency department visits, indicating a rise in RSV and influenza despite decreasing COVID-19 numbers. Dr. Drenzek addressed age-specific impacts, emphasizing the vulnerability of young children and individuals over 65. The presentation covered COVID-19 variants and their potential impact on transmission, urging continued monitoring. Dr. Drenzek also briefly discussed the status of flu and RSV in Georgia, emphasizing the importance of targeting prevention strategies based on age groups most affected. Dr. Drenzek concluded with a reminder of the collective impact of respiratory viruses and the importance of preventive measures and ongoing surveillance.

C. Animal Bites and Rabies Control – Galen C. Baxter, REHS

The presentation focused on "Animal Bites and Rabies Control" from an environmental health perspective. Mr. Baxter discussed rabies as a preventable but fatal disease, primarily reported in wild animals such as bats, raccoons, foxes, and skunks. He highlighted that any mammal could get rabies, but transmission risk varies with the size of the animal. Mr. Baxter explained regional variations in rabies reservoirs, with raccoons being a significant reservoir on the East Coast.

In Georgia, the local Boards of Health are responsible for rabies control, and the requirements are outlined in OCGA Title 31. Environmental health specialists investigate reported animal bites, working collaboratively with animal control. Mr. Baxter outlined the reporting process for animal bites, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among various agencies.

Data on reported bites from July 2018 to October 2023 were presented, with dogs and cats contributing to the majority. Geographic regions with higher population density showed more frequent bite incidents. Environmental health specialists play a crucial role in investigating bites due to the often-limited information provided.

The Georgia Rabies Control Manual, created by the State Public Health Veterinarian and DPH Epidemiology, guides environmental health specialists in their investigations. The manual covers recommendations for quarantine, observation, and testing of animals suspected of rabies. Mr. Baxter stressed the importance of collaboration among agencies to ensure the safety of animals and humans in Georgia.

D. Injury Prevention in Georgia – Lisa Dawson, M.P.H.

The presentation provided an overview of the injury prevention program's efforts, focusing on transportation safety and drowning prevention. The program operates at the state, regional, and local levels, leveraging resources across organizations, and is 100% federally funded by competitive grants.

Ms. Dawson highlighted concerning trends in injury-related deaths among Georgians aged 18 and younger, showing a steady increase in recent years. Unintentional injury deaths and intentional homicides increased, with a notable 73% increase in homicide deaths. Infants and older teens experienced the highest rates of injury-related deaths, with distinct mechanisms of injury leading to disparities.

Drowning death rates were mapped across public health districts, revealing higher rates in the southeast. The age-specific data showed that children aged 1 to 4 had the highest risk of drowning. Ms. Dawson discussed an opportunity to comprehensively assess drowning data collection and surveillance in Georgia, addressing all age groups over 18 months with a budget of \$100,000. The presentation introduced Izzy's Law, named after a four-year-old who drowned, requiring the development of a widely accessible safety plan for private swim instructors.

Additionally, Ms. Dawson discussed the Child Occupant Safety Project, funded by the Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety, which focuses on statewide child safety seat education and equipment distribution. The program also supports technician certification and renewal.

The program, addressing the widespread misuse of child safety seats, collaborates with local organizations through a mini-grant program. It emphasizes educating caregivers on correct seat use, aiming to improve the proper use of child safety seats. Ms. Dawson highlighted the program's success in distributing seats, providing education, and tracking seats involved in crashes, potentially saving lives.

During a discussion between Dr. Curran and Ms. Dawson, Dr. Curran inquired about the rapid increase in homicides. Ms. Dawson attributed the rise to various factors, suggesting that access to lethal means could be one of the issues. She emphasized the need for a more in-depth analysis of child fatality review data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation, and she also mentioned the possibility of improved reporting to DEFACS contributing to the observed trend.

E. Congenital Cytomegalovirus (cCMV) Updates – Melanie Morris, Au.D., CCC-A

Dr. Morris outlined the progress and developments in addressing cCMV since the last presentation in August. In 2018, the Georgia Academy of Pediatrics proposed cCMV screening, which was initially not added to the universal blood spot panel. However, in September 2023, the cCMV working group recommended the addition of a hearing-targeted cCMV screening for infants who fail the initial hearing screening at the birthing facility.

Since August, two more states, Texas, and Louisiana, have incorporated hearing-targeted cCMV screening into their rules and regulations. Dr. Morris emphasized the overarching goals at the Department of Public Health (DPH), which include educating medical providers and caregivers and ensuring accurate hearing screening testing at hospitals to avoid over testing.

DPH has actively collaborated with various partners, organizing educational events, and disseminating materials. Efforts include a webinar hosted by Dr. Paula Harmon and a training session for Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) coordinators across the state in April. Additionally, a child health audiologist will join on December 1 to contribute to expanded newborn hearing screening training curriculums, especially incorporating cCMV education.

Two key projects involve the child health audiologist: the expansion of newborn hearing screening training to include cCMV education and an OAE (Otoacoustic Emissions) hearing screening project. The latter aims to monitor hearing status in a broader range of children, addressing the risk of progressive hearing loss associated with cCMV. The equipment is expected to be available in health departments by the summer of 2024. Overall, the presentation reflected a proactive approach to raising awareness, enhancing screening processes, and expanding access to critical diagnostic testing for cCMV.

During the Q&A, Dr. Cheek expressed gratitude for the progress made in implementing the congenital cytomegalovirus (cCMV) screening program. Dr. Mercer, Dr. Curran, and Dr. Rodriguez were acknowledged for their contributions, highlighting the importance of experienced clinicians in addressing maternal and child health issues. Dr. Morris conveyed appreciation to the cCMV working group for their passion and dedication. Dr. Mercer sought clarification on when newborns are tested if they fail the hearing screen, and Dr. Morris emphasized that the current regulation ensures immediate testing at the birthing facility for those who fail the initial screening, preventing delays in diagnosis. Overall, there was appreciation for collaborative efforts in advancing the screening program.

F. Board Comments: NONE

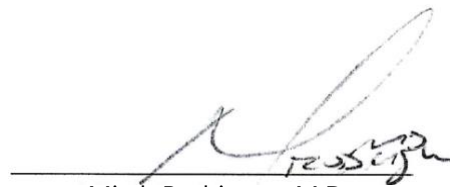
V. Adjournment:

There being no further business to be brought before the board, Dr. Curran motioned for adjournment of the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 2:04 PM. The next meeting is scheduled for January 9, 2024, in person and or by Zoom.

THESE MINUTES ARE HEREBY APPROVED AND ADOPTED THIS THE 14th of November 2023.



James Curran, M.D., M.P.H.
Chair



Mitch Rodriguez, M.D.
Secretary

Official Attachments:

1. List of Attendees
2. Agenda

November 14, 2023
Board of Public Health Meeting Attendees

Board Members

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Attendees

Public virtual meeting.