

**MINUTES OF THE  
BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEETING  
January 11, 2022**

**Members Present:**

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

**Members Absent:**

Kathryn Cheek, M.D., F.A.A.P.

The Board of Public Health held its monthly board meeting on January 11, 2022. The meeting was a virtual meeting and was hosted by Chairman James Curran, M.D., M.P.H. An agenda and a list of attendees are attached hereto and made official parts of these minutes.

I. Call to Order and Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Dr. Curran following a roll call by Dr. Rodriguez. The following member was absent: Dr. Cheek.

II. Approval/Adoption of Minutes:

Dr. Rodriguez presented the minutes of the 2021 September and November board meetings for discussion and approval. There was no discussion. The minutes passed unanimously.

III. Commissioner's Report:

Commissioner Toomey opened the board meeting by thanking Dr. Curran for hosting.

Dr. Toomey continued her report by saying that she learned about the Omicron variant on Thanksgiving from a colleague in Africa. Dr. Toomey said when she found out about Omicron, she called together the team and told them that we needed to be prepared for this, that Omicron was coming but we didn't know when. Dr. Toomey said that in 40 years of public health she's never seen anything spread quickly as Omicron, and that it was one of the most unusual viruses that she had ever experienced. DPH quickly ramped up testing, messaging about availability of antivirals and monoclonal antibody therapies, and communications with hospitals. Dr. Toomey said increased testing was a difficult task because many of the staff and contractors that DPH were relying on were themselves sick.

#### IV. New Business:

##### A. Epidemiology Update: COVID-19- Cherie L. Drenzek, D.V.M., M.S.

Cherie Drenzek, State Epidemiologist and Chief Science Officer provided a snapshot of COVID-19 in Georgia. Dr. Drenzek shared that the Delta wave subsided in November, followed by a huge Omicron surge in early December. She stated that the Omicron variant spread rapidly, and the case rates were far beyond the previous waves. Dr. Drenzek said that the data indicated the Omicron variant is much more transmissible; however, the hospitalizations and death rates are fewer than other variants. Currently, Omicron is compromising 97% of all COVID cases in Georgia. Dr. Drenzek said that despite the increases in breakthrough infections due to Omicron, most COVID deaths are still occurring in unvaccinated individuals, and in people 65 years or older. She said that 61% of Georgians have had at least one dose of the COVID vaccine.

Closing her report, Dr. Drenzek said that being vaccinated, getting booster shots, wearing a mask, and isolating if infected is critical for stopping COVID case increases.

##### B. COVID-19 Therapeutics- Alex Millman, M.D.

Alexander Millman, Chief Medical Officer presented on COVID therapeutics. During Dr. Millman's presentation he named the three therapeutic treatments: monoclonal antibodies: REGEN-COV, Bam/ete, sotrovimab, Evusheld (pre-exposure prophylaxis only), intravenous antivirals: Remdesivir, and oral antivirals which are molnupiravir and Paxlovid. Dr. Millman stated that prior to December 2021 bam/ete, REGEN-COV, and sotrovimab were the only recommended therapies for non-hospitalized patients with mild to moderate COVID-19 at high risk of serious illness from COVID. Dr. Millman also stated that Evusheld is authorized for individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised. During his report Dr. Millman shared that currently the FDA has approved Remdesivir, Paxlovid, and molnupiravir. He said that Remdesivir is to be used in hospitals and for outpatient treatment.

During his report Dr. Millman said that the availability of monoclonal antibodies and oral antibodies are extremely limited nationally. He stated allocations aren't expected to increase significantly prior to the end of January. Dr. Millman also said that currently there are over 325 providers enrolled throughout the state, and the process for placing orders has been in place since September.

In closing, Dr. Millman said that vaccination and boosting remains the most effective and most wide available tool for preventing severe illness and death from COVID-19.

##### C. COVID Vaccination and Testing- Chris Rustin, Dr.PH, M.S., R.E.H.S.

Dr. Rustin opened by stating that the state of Georgia has administered over 13 million vaccines. He said that at least 61% of the population has received one dose, 53% are fully vaccinated, and over a million people have had a booster dose. During his presentation Dr. Rustin shared a breakdown of the major vaccine providers. Those providers included public health providers, 162 hospitals, family medical offices, internal medicine, OB-GYNs, pediatricians, other specialty medical offices, and chain and independent pharmacies.

During his presentation, Dr. Rustin detailed vaccine distributions to providers. Pfizer vaccine for individuals 12 and older is shipped in increments of 300 doses; Pfizer vaccine for children 5-11 years of age is shipped in increments of 100 doses; Moderna and Janssen vaccines authorized for individuals 18 years and older are shipped in increments of 100 doses.

Dr. Rustin said it is recommended that individuals 12 and older who got the Pfizer vaccine and individuals who got the Moderna vaccine should receive a booster dose five months after their initial vaccine series. Individuals who received Janssen COVID vaccine should get their booster at least two months after their initial dose.

DPH has partnered with the Georgia Health Care Association to distribute information to Long Term Care Facilities on providing booster vaccines to residents and staff. The most recent numbers show that 66.5% of the residents in long term care facilities have had their booster shots, and 26.6% of the staff have been boosted. DPH has a vendor to provide vaccinations and testing in jails and correctional facilities. Dr. Rustin concluded by saying that DPH also has a school testing program. He said this school testing program allows K-12 schools to enroll with a DPH vendor to provide free COVID testing for students, faculty, staff, and family members.

#### V. Board Comments

Dr. Curran asked if public agencies could be reimbursed through private insurance for testing, vaccines, and antivirals? Dr. Rustin responded that public health departments are like any medical provider; they can bill insurance or the HRSA program. Dr. Rustin said testing is free, but providers may bill insurance if it is available. No one is turned away.

#### VI. Additional Comments

Commissioner Toomey said that there has been a lot of misinformation about Omicron. Such as this variant isn't as serious, it's less severe, and the vaccine doesn't work. She said this is a challenge as we continue to try to get people vaccinated and boosted.

Dr. Toomey also shared a new Administrative Order with the board referencing children and in-person learning. The Commissioner believes that children should be learning in school, in person; and we need to make every effort possible to ensure students, teachers, and other staff can remain safely in school. Dr. Toomey said the recommended time for quarantine is five (5) days from last known exposure, if the person remains asymptomatic, with 5 additional days of wearing a well-fitting mask.

The Commissioner also addressed the discussion in the media about the vaccine and vaccination reporting system at the Department of Public Health. She said that the systems at DPH are legacy, and the systems were never designed to take on the amount of data that they have been. She said that DPH has been working on a new system for the past year, and this remains a priority.

Concluding, Dr. Toomey thanked every public health worker at the state, district, and county levels. She said that these individuals are continuing to protect the state of Georgia as we continue to fight this pandemic.

VII. 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 2:25 p.m.

THESE MINUTES ARE HEREBY APPROVED AND ADOPTED THIS THE 8<sup>th</sup> DAY OF FEBRUARY 2022.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Misael Rodriguez', written over a horizontal line.

Misael Rodriguez, M.D.  
Secretary

Official Attachments:

1. List of Attendees
2. Agenda

January 11, 2022

**Board of Public Health Meeting Attendees**

**Board Members**

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**Attendees**

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Public virtual meeting.