

## **Wheeling-Ohio County Board of Health**

Minutes of March 12, 2024, regular meeting

The Wheeling - Ohio County Board of Health met on March 12, 2024, at 12:00pm in the City/County Building, Ohio County Commission office, Wheeling West Virginia.

Board members present were Dr. John Holloway, Elisabeth Slater, Tom Tuttle, and Chad Thalman. Staff present included Howard Gamble, Administrator of the Wheeling-Ohio County Health Department and County Health Officer Dr. William S. Przybysz.

The meeting was called to order by Board of Health Chairman Dr. John Holloway.

Minutes of the January 9, 2024, Board of Health meeting was distributed to members prior to the meeting. Minutes were approved.

Dr. Przybysz gave a Health Officer's report. Dr. Przybysz updated the board on the activities of Project HOPE, which continues to conduct weekly rounds and services. He also gave a short update on disease occurrences in the county. Respiratory viruses are still up in the county and Ohio Valley.

The administrator gave a report on department programs and services.

### **Environmental Fees**

- The administrator presented to the Board of Health a draft copy of "Fees for Permit & Environmental Health Services" for the WOCHC. The administrator gave a short overview of the situation involving local health departments in West Virginia and the fees for permit rule.
- The administrator requested that the Board of Health approve that prior to the new rule being approved by the Board and appointing agencies that the current Fees for Permit and Environmental Health Services remain in effect. Once the new rule completes the required process, it will replace the old process.
- The new fee rule and "fee bridge" were approved and will now go out for public comment.

### **Office Updates**

- The department is still working on billing and credentialing. The department did hear back from WV Medicaid on March 6<sup>th</sup> requesting some minor corrections to our 2023 application.

### **Legal Updates**

- The administrator gave a short update on legal issues pending in court involving the health department. These updates included a sewage and operational issue with Scenic Sites and related properties, the feeding of raccoons and a legal issue regarding sewage that the health department was not part of the legal proceedings.

- Holding Tank issue on new housing development. (one holding tank permit has been issued for a holding tank installed at a new home)
- WV Supreme Court of Appeals action regarding sewage system issue at Washington Farms (two permits for on-site sewage systems have been issued by the WOCHD)
- Scenic Sites. A Circuit Court decision in favor of Klages Properties to provide specific legal citations regarding the issues at the venue. (WOCHD has forward necessary information to OCPAs office)

### **Financial**

- The Board was provided with the WOCHD Financial Review, which included the January and February 2024 financials.
- The WOCHD annual audit was completed in February, and the department received the final report. Copies of the audit Report to the Board were provided to Board members. The full audit will be distributed later, or before the next Board of Health meeting. No issues were announced during the audit. The administrator provided a copy of the Board acknowledgment letter from the Auditing firm.

### **2024 Legislative Calendar**

- A short update was given on bills that passed that have a direct impact on public health and the WOCHD.
- At this time the Budget bill contains funding for LHDs to provide between a 4-5% pay increase to staff. This funding situation has occurred before. However, the proposed budget and any upcoming special session meetings (May special session) or other events could have an impact on this funding.
- Vaccination Bill (HB5105) was passed as amended. The bill did remove vaccination requirements for students in virtual public schools. It also would allow private and parochial schools to establish their own policies on vaccinations. However, the Senate removed a provision that would have allowed parents to get their public-school children exempted from the required vaccinations for specified diseases simply by sending the school a letter claiming they had a religious objection.
- Raw Milk (HS4911) will expand sales of raw milk in WV. No need for the herd sharing requirements that were put into place in 2016 and allow for the sale of raw milk if the milk is labeled as unpasteurized raw milk and carries a warning about the risk of foodborne illness. It removed a clause about providing immunity from liability.
- SB17 – Fees for Permit
- SB 269 – Excluding test strips from definition of drug paraphernalia.
- SB 378 – Prohibiting smoking in vehicle when minor 16 or under is present.
- HB 4667 – Prohibiting syringe services programs from distributing listed smoking devices.
- HB 5017 – Relating to mobile food establishment reciprocity.

### **Other**

The administrator provided the Board with a Disease Update regarding Measles, COVID, Flu and other viruses.

#### **Measles: Increasing**

CDC reports we have had 45 cases across 17 states so far, which almost surpasses last year's total of 58 cases across 20 states. Cases are driven by lots of little sparks across the nation, opposed to one big outbreak like in 2019. The more embers, the more likely it is that they find unvaccinated pockets and spread like wildfire. We don't know much else, as the CDC website desperately needs a refresh. For example, the hospitalization rate, vaccination status, or age bracket of the cases is not publicly known. An outbreak which started at a Chicago migrant center includes several so far. Chicago Public Health Department has advised all families staying at the shelter to keep their children in place. Unfortunately, this population has a lot of trauma, is very hesitant to vaccines, and distrusts institutions. CDC has sent a team to support the local response. A measles case (child who just returned from international travel) arrived at a Sacramento Hospital last week, exposing about 300 people. No additional cases have been reported yet. The Florida elementary school outbreak is holding strong at 9 kids. The outbreak is declared over once two incubation periods have passed (45 days), which is set to occur in the beginning of April. The increase in measles is not exclusive to the U.S. For example, the U.K. is having a very bad year, marking a 10-year high. Since February, 239 new cases were reported, with the majority (63%) of cases among children under 10 years old. Same with Canada: In the first two months of 2024, there are 20 cases, with several community acquired. There were 12 measles cases in total last year, which were all travel related. While the raw number of cases remain low (we aren't seeing even close to pre-vaccine era numbers), each outbreak takes a ridiculous number of resources. For example, a small outbreak in Tucson in 2011 cost close to \$800,000. Moreover, the increase in measles is happening within a concerning context: vaccination rates declining due to a rapidly changing information landscape, decline in trust, and continued individualism. There are very few signs that this will be changing anytime soon.

### **Norovirus: Surging**

Norovirus—a virus that causes stomach cramping, intense episodes of vomiting and diarrhea, and sometimes fevers—is taking off in the Northern Hemisphere. Ten percent of the population should expect to get sick. It's very tough to protect yourself against this virus, but not impossible.

### **Influenza-like illnesses: Moderate and finally declining?**

Within the last few weeks, the percentage of people going to the doctor for fever or cough has slightly declined after remaining stagnant for weeks. Unfortunately, it looks like respiratory seasons are back to "pre-pandemic" patterns, stretching out into March and April.

### **Flu: Moderate and staggering**

The respiratory season stretching out is mostly due to flu strain B taking over (which is typical). Regardless, we've had a pretty "normal" flu season, as hospitalizations this year are about in the middle of the pack compared to previous years.

### **Covid-19: Moderate and declining.**

Covid-19 wastewater levels, for the first time this season, have reached "moderate" levels. While it remains highest in the South, levels there are falling too.

**Bottom Line**

Respiratory season is slowly waning, but measles and norovirus are ramping up. And an underlying tragedy is unfolding that is impossible to ignore: loss of trust spilling into all vaccine-preventable diseases. Spring break is right around the corner, and there is still a considerable amount of respiratory disease out there right now. If you don't want your travel plans interrupted, the best thing you can do is keep up with vaccines, wash those hands, and wear a mask, especially while traveling.

In Unfinished Business, no discussion or action was taken regarding a continued request to allow smoking at Dr. Lee Jones Miracles Happened facility.

With no other business before the Board, the Board moved for adjournment. The next regular Board of Health meeting is scheduled for May 7, 2024.

**SUBMITTED BY**

William S. Przybysz, MD, Health Officer  
May 7, 2024

**APPROVED BY**

John D Holloway, MD, Board Chairman  
May 7, 2024