

BOARD OF HEALTH MINUTES
May 10, 2021
TOWN BUILDING

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 p.m. Present by remote roll call were Arne Soslow, M. D. (AS), John Schuler M.D. (JS) Susan Green (SG), Robert DeFrancesco DMD (RD) Chair, Julia Junghanns, (JJ) Director of Public Health, Ruth Mori (RM), Public Health Nurse, Dr. Arthur Unobskey (AU), Superintendent of Schools, Kim Reichelt (KR), School Committee Member, Jeanne Downs (JD), School Committee Chair, and Ellen Mahoney MD, School Physician, Amy Schoeff (AS), Public Health Nurse Contact Tracer.

6:15 RD: Roll call to open the meeting: JS – yes, SG – yes, RD-yes, AS-yes

SG: In compliance with revised Open Meeting Law requirements, we will live stream the meeting on WayCAM, Public Comments will be received by phone at 508-358-6812 for this meeting. The phone number will be active during the public comment portion of the meeting. Thank you in advance for your patience; we intend to address all calls that come in during the public comment period.

Pooled Surveillance COVID Testing Requirements for Students Participating in In-Person Extra-Curricular Activities

6:17 Brian McNamara joined the meeting

Jeanne Downs provided background on this topic. She said the students are all in school and surveillance testing is one of the mitigating strategies. Surveillance testing is an accountability measure, identifies asymptomatic staff and students, used to prevent community spread on a population where spontaneous interactions are more likely than in a classroom setting. The districts in our athletic conference are doing the pooled surveillance testing in 8 out of 11 of the schools.

Most families have been supportive, about 12-14 showed concern. Jeanne describes the pushback as singling out students and students shouldn't be obligated to test.

AU: As of today's meeting, 60% of the students tested in the pooled surveillance testing, with no positive results. There has been an increase in participation. He said the process is minimally invasive in terms of time and the swab process is a self-swab of the lower nostrils.

JS asked if there is a cost to participate. JD said it is free. AS asked what the vaccination rate is among these students in extra-curriculars. No one was certain of the vaccination rate of students in extra-curricular activities. Vaccinated only pool are tested together even though they are not required to be in pooled testing.

JS said commenters cited literature from over a month ago and we have seen lower rates of positivity and lower COVID cases in MA. Only 20 parents are objecting, though their kids are generally participating in the pooled surveillance testing. He thinks times are different and 20 students won't make a difference.

AS said it is a shame that the School Committee did not come to the BoH since school athletics lead to

COVID spreading.

RM thinks there is a case of in-school transmission. Someone less than 6 feet away from a person who tested positive for COVID is considered a close contact though individuals between 3 -6 feet don't need to quarantine. The situation involves a student who was a 3-6 foot close contact who subsequently was not required to quarantine (as per the newer state guidance) and tested positive 5 days after being identified as a close contact. This appears to be the first case of in-school transmission.

EM the more participation, the better the testing system, even with the COVID numbers going down 16 year olds were able to get vaccinated as of April 19th and it was difficult to get it so students may not be fully vaccinated for a while.

RD What do we need to do to move forward? We should get guidance from town counsel regarding mandating testing and whether that is allowed or within our purview. JD encouraged that town counsel speak to the school committee counsel. There was continued discussion. RD in favor of continued pooled testing. JS said there has been significant change lately, encourage parents and children to be vaccinated. He thinks the test should be voluntary for extra-curricular. AS: Thinks we should have a motion to support testing and he thinks testing should be mandatory. SG: Thinks testing should be mandatory for extra-curricular in person activities. BM: In favor of making the testing voluntary and emphasizes the importance of testing.

7:00 RD left the meeting.

There was continued discussion and a recap of the Board of Health discussion before RD left the meeting.

7:11 p.m. Public comment

JJ reviewed the comments that were provided in writing/via email to the BoH (BoH confirmed they had reviewed the emails/letters) as follows:

Copy of letter to School Committee dated May 5, 2021 same name list in letter to BoH below, plus D. Toto, and J. Toto (not in support).

email dtd 5/10/21 to BoH from Mary Ellen Lyons, feels threatened and harassed, thinks it's a violation of HIPAA.(not in support)

Letter dtd 5/10/21 to BoH from C. Owen, D. Protopapa, G. Silva, S. Sun, J. Sun A. Boschetto, H. Heilman, B. Heilman, M. Lyons, T. Henning, T. Bonvie, L. Aidala, R. Aidala, L. Prunier, B. Prunier, R. Stafford, B. Dulong N. Urato, others not named: states mandated testing is a violation of rights, why require asymptomatic kids to get tested, low transmission rates/low cases in town, reviews other towns and what they are doing, Dr. Joseph Allen presentation to School Committee that said testing is not necessary:(not in support)

Email Letter dtd 5/10/21 from T. Boschetto: is asking BoH to consider Positive IgG Covid Antibody testing instead and provided CDC guidance on this exemption policy. (not in support).

email dtd 5/9/21 from S. Srinivasan; cites info on CDC suggesting weekly surveillance testing, and idea of requiring testing for sports participation. Includes info on testing recommendations, quoted Dr. Fauci 4/6 statement on finding team sports driving cases, and CDC director on clusters related to sports. Stated low participation in testing with WHS student athletes. (in support)

email dtd 5/9/21 E. Wuerz; cited similar information from Fauci and CDC listed in above comment and low participation in testing with WHS student athletes. (in support).

Email dtd 5/10/21 from J Downs, provided info/chart about the 11 DCL districts.

Called in:

Caroline Owens she is hoping she received our letter from 18 concerned parents. Appreciate comments from JS and BM not mandating testing. The mandate for students in athletics is greater than students in clubs. Not required for teachers or coaches who may or may not be vaccinated. Doesn't think softball is riskier than being in class 3' apart. Testing isn't necessary for low transmission. Doesn't want her healthy child subjected to testing when child is asymptomatic. There are privacy, state and federal legal issues. The program should be voluntary.

Sejal Srinivasan frames it as a health and legal issues which are separate. CDC says to test once or twice a week for athletics. All students in extra-curricular activities are on lists and are reviewed for compliance with the pooled testing policy. Doesn't see the test as a big burden.

7:21 AS left the meeting.

7:23 p.m. JS Motion to adjourn the meeting, second BM roll call JS yes SG yes. BM yes 3-0-0

7:23 p.m. Adjourned

Provided by S. Green, Board of Health member

Submitted by Board of Health member Susan Green

APPROVED032421