

Columbus Board of Health Meeting Minutes
April 22, 2020

Presiding: Rajinder Chhokar-MD

Attending Board Members: James Lopez-DMD, Devica Alappan-MD, Rebecca Covington (Mayor's Office), Isaiah Hugley, Yasmin Cathright

Excused Absences: Sylvester McRae-MD

Others Present: Beverley Townsend-MD, Gwen Cunningham, Tori Endres, Asante' Hilts, Steve Gunby-Atty, Kimberly Fuller-RN, Ashley Bassett, Joie Gosa, Brandi Nelson, Peggy Hallmark

In keeping with CDC/GDPH COVID-19 Community Mitigation Recommendations this board of health meeting was held by conference call. Attendees verified by roll call.

Agenda Topic	Discussion	Decision	Responsibility
Call to order	Dr. Chhokar called the meeting to order at 1:06 pm.	None	None
Approval of Minutes	Dr. Chhokar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledged a quorum was present. Asked attending members to refer to minutes from the March meeting. With no questions or discussion from the members, Dr. Chhokar asked for a motion of approval. • With nothing on the agenda for voting, called for the Director's report and COVID-19 status. 	Motion made by Dr. Lopez, seconded by Mr. Hugley, and approved by all members present.	None
District Health Director's Report	Dr. Townsend: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stated that COVID-19 updates are being sent to the board members daily and as received through Peggy Hallmark and Pam Kirkland. Currently 237 cases in Muscogee County and 4 deaths. For the West Central Health District, the total is 1,169 cases and 61 recorded deaths, which covers the entirety of 16 counties. Figures are from the CDC after counties submit the data. • COVID Testing has ramped up as more test kits come in and now have opportunity to get faster turnaround for results: 24-48 hours versus 7-10 days. CDC is 	None	None

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<p>District Health Director Report Cont'd</p>	<p>constantly updating information including changing test criteria to get 1st responders and infrastructure workers tested and back to work sooner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information from the Governor came on Monday regarding phased re-opening of businesses starting on Friday with hair salons, barber shops and gyms and Monday for restaurants. Order is still in place to shelter at home until the end of the month and the order for public health state of emergency is in place through May 13th. Governor is recommending that elderly (age 60 and above) be careful to stay at home and shelter in place until May 13th. • Public Health standpoint is to admonish people to be very careful when going out, to practice social distancing, wear masks and be safe. • Specimen collection center out back of this building is running well. Day to day have had National Guard on site as well as law enforcement to assist. National Guard help with nursing home cleaning, decontamination and with testing across the state. All counties in WCHD are testing and testing is free. Thanks go to city and state law enforcement officers for manning our test sites and keeping control to ensure safety. Testing at public health departments are totally free to patrons, funded by the state. Health department does take referrals and does not turn anyone away unless they do not meet test criteria. The test site is both drive up and walk up, PUI number or no PUI number. 		

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<p>District Health Director Report Cont'd</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of information is out regarding COVID-19 treatment, but there are none that are approved by the FDA yet. Not all information out there is reliable. Be sure to go by the CDC guidelines. • All public health staff have been directed to COVID-19 response. Permission was needed to redirect staff that are in federally funded programs. Contact tracing has started and is a monumental job. Extra staff is needed to ensure we get done all that needs to be done. • The call center is answering calls from 8:30 am to 7:00 pm Monday through Friday. The test site is open from 8:30 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday and from 9 am to 12 pm on Saturdays. • Planning to have another test site in South Columbus using National Guard, for those who are not able to get here. NG have been currently reassigned, so we are still working on that. We do not readily have the capacity to meet the need. 		
<p>Old Business</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>New Business</p>	<p>Phased Openings Communication/Education - Mr. Hugley: Understands the Governor's order about opening businesses but is concerned about barber shops, salons and similar businesses reopening. Many are in areas where they are not clear on how serious this is, such as in our low-income areas, perhaps from a lack of understanding or healthcare. Expressed his concern that there may be more concern about making money than concern about the risk. Mr. Hugley is concerned that we are not communicating the seriousness of this virus in certain segments of our community and that we may see an expanded spread of the virus with openings.</p>		

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<p>New Business Cont'd</p>	<p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – It would be important for the Mayor and his officials to get out information with clarity to the street. Some mayors are speaking differently than the decision made. Our consolidated government will need to make a statement on their decision. Public Health is all about educating and are doing so to the best of our ability. We will be happy to educate and let them know how important it is to stay safe.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Mr. Hugley – Still concerned that it is easy to say open and practice social distancing, but in areas like Cusseta Road or Andrews Road, they will just go back to business as usual and their safety is a serious concern.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Chhokar – Asked that the health department, or board of health, request that the Mayor make a statement to emphasize that CDC recommendations still should be followed even though businesses are opening. Stressed that it must be repeated often and strongly on the television. The board strongly agrees with the concern. Requested this be put in the form of a motion to be brought to the Mayor during the 3pm conference call. Asked to hear from others on this recommendation.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Lopez – Informed that his practice has been totally shut down due to ADA and CDC guidelines since March 16th. Stated the recent Governor’s order is problematic for dentists. The CDC has issued an order for dentists only to perform emergency treatment. Some dentists are now adamant to open full blast. They fail to understand the CDC restriction is mentioned in the executive order and it is a dentistry board violation to violate the CDC guidelines. Dentists are high risk to be infected or to infect others.</p>		

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<p>New Business Cont'd</p>	<p>Georgia Dental Association is asking for clarification from the Governor today. It could happen that a dentist infects or is accused of infecting a patient or staff member. Dentistry would pay the price nationwide as when the oral surgeon years ago infected others with HIV. (cited case facts). Questioned what is about to happen in Georgia and encouraged this board to go to the Governor as the Georgia Dental Association is doing.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Chhokar – Thanked Dr. Lopez and requested this to be brought to the Mayor’s attention and to express the concern during the conference call. Stated the board’s duty is to the public’s health. Asked that someone make a motion to ask the Mayor to emphasize the CDC guidelines.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Rebecca Covington – Stated she is taking notes and will bring this to the Mayor’s attention.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Ms. Cathright – Stated it is not just businesses, also religious organizations that are impacted. Emphasized the Mayor should pinpoint the specific issues of concern and specifically state what CDC guidelines say and what they mean, not just for businesses but for religious organization as well.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Alappan – Agreed and shares the concerns and brought the motion.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Chhokar – Thanked the board members. Stated that the board will make the recommendation to the Mayor to make a public statement advising the people CDC guidelines should be strictly followed to be safe and that places that are allowed to open are to continue with CDC recommendations.</p>	<p>Motion made by Dr. Alappan for the board to recommend to the Mayor that he should issue an emphasized message that it is strongly urged by the Columbus Dept of Public Health to take precautions and to adhere to the CDC recommendations for COVID-19 safety and social distancing guidelines as businesses and organizations reopen.</p> <p>Dr. Lopez seconded the motion.</p> <p>The motion passed unanimously.</p>	<p>Members to attend the Mayor’s 3pm conference call and state the board of health position and decision of recommendation.</p>

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New Business Cont'd	<p>RESPONSE: Rebecca Covington – The Mayor cannot make people follow the guidelines.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Chhokar – The board understands the Mayor cannot mandate or force people but asks as a courtesy that he emphasize the importance when he informs the people of openings.</p>		
Excused Absences	Dr. Sylvester McRae	None	None
Program Reports	<p>Dr. Chhokar:</p> <p>Directed members to refer to written reports (Nursing, Environmental Health, Financial) that have been emailed and/or faxed to all board members and to voice any question or concern with that information.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. Alappan - As restaurants reopen are there any special recommendations or new rules?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Ashley Bassett, Environmental Health – We are waiting on further guidelines from the state. At present we still have the 10 people limit guideline in dining area with 6 feet social distance.</p> <p>No other questions from written program reports.</p>	Program reports are attached and made a part of these minutes.	
Financial Report	<p>Written report distributed to all members via email and/or fax.</p> <p>No questions.</p>	None	None
Other	<p>Dr. Chhokar asked the group for any other concerns.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. Chhokar – Asked Dr. Townsend to clarify with the Commissioner whether the Mayor’s office can make the statement that the board is recommending.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – Stated that the board can make the recommendation to Mayor and that the Mayor</p>		

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<p>Other Cont'd</p>	<p>knows what the realm of his authority is. The Executive Order is in place so the Mayor does know how far he can expand reopening. Suggested the board ask on the Mayor's call at 3pm today or Ms. Covington can ask him offline.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Rebecca Covington – Stated she would absolutely inform the Mayor of the recommendation and ask that the CDC guidelines be specifically recommended in announcements.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Alappan – Suggested making announcements very clear, by not saying “CDC basic guidelines”, instead to say, “do not go out if you have a fever, wear mask, practice hand washing and social distance.” This is what is strongly recommended by the board of health.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Lopez – Public does not know how to properly wear masks or take off gloves, for instance taking gloves off with their teeth. People need to be taught how to properly use PPE.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Chhokar – Asked Dr. Townsend to do public announcements with those instructions.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – Stated it will be covered on interviews and public announcements and plan to include a video demonstration. People who come through the test site are educated. The department will continue to use the free venues to get the message out and to educate the people. The department does use CCGTV and other free resources and what we can afford to pay for. The department has paid for time and bought a package for that purpose and are using those resources.</p>		

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Adjournment	With no other business, the meeting was adjourned by Dr. Chhokar at 1:49 pm.		

NEXT BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING TO BE HELD:

MAY 27, 2020 1:00 PM

VIA CONFERENCE CALL

Columbus Board of Health Minutes Respectfully submitted by:

Peggy Hallmark, Secretary