

**Columbus Board of Health Meeting Minutes**  
**June 23, 2021**

**Presiding:** Rajinder Chhokar-MD  
**Attending Board Members:** James Lopez-DDS, Devica Alappan-MD, Sylvester McRae, MD, Crystal Farley (City Mgr Office), Richard Bishop (Mayor Office)  
**Not Present:** Yasmin Cathright  
**Others Present:** Beverley Townsend-MD, Asante' Hilts, Gwen Cunningham, Tori Endres, Pam Kirkland, Kimberly Fuller, Kristi Ludy, Brandi Nelson, Patrick Peck, Peggy Hallmark

<b>In keeping with CDC/GDPH COVID-19 Community Mitigation Recommendations, this board of health meeting was held by conference call. All reports were emailed to all board members. Attendees verified by roll call.</b>			
<b>Agenda Topic</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>Decision</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>Call to order</b>	Dr. Chhokar called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm. Secretary completed roll call.	None	None
<b>Approval of Minutes</b>	Dr. Chhokar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledged a quorum was present. Referred to minutes from the May meeting. With no questions or discussion from the members, Dr. Chhokar asked for a motion of approval.</li> <li>Called for the Director's report.</li> </ul>	Motion made by Dr. Lopez, seconded by Dr. McRae, and approved by all members present.	None
<b>Director's Report</b>	Dr. Townsend: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are at the close out for our year end which is June 30<sup>th</sup>. Everyone is working to make sure we have everything in balance and in order for our annual audit.</li> <li>We have been discussing the need for some morale booster for employees as they have worked hard through the pandemic, and we want to encourage them and show our appreciation. We so appreciate all the support from you, our board of health.</li> </ul>	None	None

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<b>Financial Report</b>	<p>Gwen Cunningham:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presented the financial overview, through the end of May 2021, with our original budget of \$5,915,206 shown on line one. We have had five revisions throughout the year and are currently working with a budget of \$6,252,208. Total expenses as of the end of May are \$5,831,951.08, which is 93% of the budget and 2% above target for eleven months of operations. Line 4 shows a comparison to expenses last year with an increase in spending of \$356,888.37. Line five shows our total fees and income at \$1,028,882.70. Lines 6 through 17 show line items for fees with a comparison to the same time last year. Line 18 shows an overall increase of \$36,444.83. Line 19 shows Admin Claiming Income with a decrease because of the delay in the state issuing funds. The following two pages detail all expenses and revenue by line item. Page 4 shows our current grants which fall under the lead county, and all are on target for eleven months of operation.</li> </ul> <p>There were no questions.</p>	The Financial Report is attached and made a part of these minutes.	None
<b>Excused Absences</b>	Yasmin Cathright	None	None
<b>Old Business</b>	None	None	None
<b>New Business</b>	None	None	None

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<b>Program Reports</b>	<p><b>Epidemiology COVID 19 Update - Brandi Nelson</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muscogee County total confirmed cases to date as of June 23<sup>rd</sup> is around 14,826. The weekly report is for the previous 14-day period from 6/5 to 6/18 and compared to the two-week period of 5/29 to 6/11. For the 6/14 week there were 45 confirmed cases per 100K and 37 cases per 100K on the 6/21 report. The 14-day positivity rate was 3.0% on the 6/14 report and 2.6% on 6/21, with the number probable cases being at 2,008, continuing to trend downward. Total hospitalizations are around 1,200 with 434 confirmed deaths. Looking at demographics, the 25-34 age group is impacted significantly with COVID; black Americans are affected disproportionately when compared to their counterparts. The UK variant is dominating in our region, however because our vaccination rate is low, the concern is that the Delta variant may become dominant. What we are doing is promoting vaccination in hope of getting more people vaccinated.</li> </ul> <p>QUESTION: Dr. Alappan – Do you know how many cases of Delta variant are in Columbus?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Brandi Nelson – We do not have that specific information because the CDC changed how it is reported. It is not reported on an individual basis but is reported proportionately. However, on a call this week with the state Epi said that it was around 13 for the Delta variant in Georgia.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. Alappan – In Georgia, but you do not have the number for specifically for Columbus?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Brandi Nelson – No, we do not have that information.</p>	<p>Program reports are attached and made a part of these minutes.</p>	<p>None</p>

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<p><b>Program Reports Continued</b></p>	<p><b>Epidemiology COVID 19 Update – Cont’d</b></p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. McRae – In determining one variant from another, we are told the Delta is the most recent. Are the hospitals able to distinguish what variant they are treating?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Brandi Nelson – We will not know that unless the hospitals submit their specimens through genomic sequencing. That information is received by the CDC. We go to the CDC website for the variant proportions and right now the Delta variant is determined to be a 0.4% of total Georgia cases.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. McRae – So are the hospitals reporting or not?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Brandi Nelson - We do not see what specific hospitals are submitting specimens.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. McRae – Seems we would want to know the variants in our community. Are you saying you may or may not get that information? And when can we get that information?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Brandi Nelson - We do get that information when it is submitted. GDPH is working on getting variant information by county, but at this point in time we do not have what variant is circulating in Columbus. As soon as that information is available, I will definitely report it.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – Some detailed information is not readily available to us. The hospitals must send specimens up for variant testing. That is not regular testing but genomic sequence testing at the GA Public Health Laboratory. If the hospitals do not request testing to identify the variant, then a particular variant may not show with routine testing. So far, they have not deciphered out</p>		

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<p><b>Program Reports Continued</b></p>	<p><b>Epidemiology COVID 19 Update – Cont’d</b></p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – The least vaccinated are teens and 20s and they are the group that are succumbing to the variants. One of the issues, Dr. McRae, is that viruses continue to mutate, and it is hard to keep a handle on the changes.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. McRae - What approach are we taking to encourage the young people to get vaccinated? And what are we doing as a public health agency to promote better compliance of our hospital personnel to get vaccinated? Does that fall outside of our realm?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – It does fall outside our realm. Each hospital, each agency must promote from within. We educate in media, schools, and colleges – the Strike Team goes out to communities to make the vaccine accessible to the population. We do see some pushback, typically young people and parents of teens, to which the pediatricians can speak to, but we are going wherever we can and do educate and encourage. Asante’, please inform the board of some of the places the Strike Team goes and the many avenues we are using.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. McRae – Before Asante’ responds, what percentage of public health employees across the state are vaccinated?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – I do not know the percentage across the state. In all honesty, since the Governor put out his order, we cannot ask, nor can we require employees to get the vaccine in Public Health as a state agency.</p>		

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<p><b>Program Reports Continued</b></p>	<p><b>Epidemiology COVID 19 Update – Cont’d</b></p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. McRae – I am very disturbed that for both hospitals 38-40% of employees are vaccinated. Piedmont was offering monetary incentive to employees to get vaccinated and I am told in the weeks/months to come their plan is to insist employees be vaccinated. It is almost embarrassing as a healthcare worker to have only 38-40% of staff utilize something that is proven to save lives.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – That is part of the hesitancy. I don’t know whether the hospital system is affected by the Governor’s decision. There are some hospitals in other states that have fired some for not getting vaccinated. I do know for us that we cannot force people to get the vaccine and we cannot offer incentives or lotteries for vaccination. Also, they have not found that incentives increase the vaccination rate. We cannot mandate in Public Health, nor can we go into GRITS to find whether a staff or any person has been vaccinated.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. McRae – Are we still in possession of the J&amp;J vaccine and are we still utilizing them? If yes – what can we do to not waste?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – We do have it and we cannot avoid waste if people will not accept it. If one person walks in and wants the vaccine, we open a vial and if no one else comes in within the allotted time, then the remainder is wasted. We have had vaccine remaining after an event and literally run through the parking lot to offer it to people and then had them refuse. If we had a single dose vial it would be solved, but manufacturers are not going to do that.</p>		

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<p><b>Program Reports</b> <b>Continued</b></p>	<p><b>Epidemiology COVID 19 Update – Cont’d</b></p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. McRae – Can the state allow us to ship it to other countries?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – President Biden is doing that through the CDC. What we can and will do is give vaccine to private providers when they have the proper storage.</p> <p>QUESTION: Dr. Chhokar – You have to appreciate all the effort to educate and to encourage the people to get the vaccine. How many injections are in one vial?</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Townsend – Moderna has 10 doses, Pfizer has 6, which requires dilution, and the Johnson &amp; Johnson has 5.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Dr. Chhokar – We must have a way of convincing people in the 19-20, college age range who have said no they do not want it and that doubt the government’s intention. We wish we could convince people more that the vaccine is lifesaving.</p> <p><b>Public Information – Pam Kirkland</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press releases continue with weekly COVID-19 updates including number of cases, information on testing and vaccines schedules. We are focused more on vaccines rather than case numbers. Currently have about 57,000 people fully vaccinated and 65,000 have at least one dose; about 29% of the population vaccinated in Muscogee County. Releases also on vaccination sites, dates, times throughout the county and the district.</li> </ul>		



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<p><b>Program Reports Continued</b></p>	<p><b>Public Information – Cont’d</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several interviews, television, radio, and newspaper with all pertaining to COVID-19 vaccines; vaccine hesitancy and awareness; HIV home test kits; webinars; Fatherhood Initiative and COVID-19 rapid test availability.</li> <li>• Social media campaigns covered COVID vaccine clinics; meningitis; vaccine requirements; mosquitoes Tip-N-Toss; and videos on You Tube.</li> </ul> <p><b>Environmental Health – Kristi Ludy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referred to the EH report which was emailed to all board members. Pages 1 and 2 show a summary of EH activity for the month of May, which includes 63 routine inspections and 8 initial inspections. There was a total of 11 pools &amp; spa inspections: 4 routine tourist accommodations, and 1 body art inspection. There were 27 animal to human exposure investigations, 1 animal only and 14 human &amp; animal exposure investigations. Of these, 2 animals were tested for rabies, and none were positive. For Vector Control there were 25 complaints and 25 complaint investigations. Onsite Sewage and Well Water had 4 new system permits and 3 investigations. Details for food service inspections, tourist accommodations, pool &amp; spas, for body art studios are all listed on pages 3 through 8 of the report.</li> </ul> <p>There were no questions.</p> <p><b>Nursing Report – Kimberly Fuller</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referred to the Nursing report emailed to board members and reported 7,346 initial visits, 2,079 return visits for a total of 9,425 visits from July 1 through May 31<sup>st</sup>. Last year for the same time, total visits were 8,956.</li> </ul>	<p>Program reports are attached and made a part of these minutes.</p>	<p>None</p>

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<b>Adjournment</b>	<p>Dr Chhokar announced next meeting date is August 25<sup>th</sup>. There will be no meeting for the month of July.</p> <p>With no other business, the meeting was adjourned by Dr. Chhokar at 1:43 pm.</p>		

**NEXT BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING  
TO BE HELD ON  
August 25, 2021, at 1:00 PM**

**Columbus Board of Health Minutes respectfully submitted by Secretary Peggy Hallmark**