

**Board of Health
Meeting Minutes
Remote Participation Conference Call
February 28, 2022**

Present:

Anita Raj, Chair
Susan Schwartz, Vice Chair
Bea Brunkhorst
Ann Kiessling
Maureen Richichi

Staff Present:

Heidi Porter, Director of Health and
Human Services
Katharine Dagle, Assistant Health Director
Margaret Root, Recording Secretary

Others Present (based on Zoom ID):

Kelly Casey, Bedford resident
Michael Indelicato, Bedford resident
Alison O’Connell, Bedford resident

Steve Hagan, Bedford resident
Robert Kalantari, Bedford resident
Mike Rosenberg, Bedford resident

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 PM. Ms. Raj chaired. Dr. Brunkhorst moved to open the meeting. Ms. Schwartz seconded the motion. A roll call vote of 5-0-0 opened the meeting.

Ms. Raj made a statement: “Pursuant to a bill signed into law by Governor Baker on June 16, 2021, continuing suspension of certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law through April 1, 2022, this meeting of the Bedford Board of Health will be conducted via remote participation. Persons who would like to listen or view this meeting while in progress may do so by Zoom or by phone. This meeting will also be recorded and the recording will be available on the Board of Health website alongside the minutes. All votes taken by this body shall be by roll call vote.”

Public Comment

Ms. Raj opened the meeting to any public comments.

As there were no public comments, Ms. Raj closed the public comment portion of the meeting.

COVID-19 Response: Data Evaluation, Mask Advisory - Discussion and Potential Vote

Ms. Raj commented on the DESE change that students were allowed to not wear a mask while riding the school buses. Ms. Richichi commented that she thought masks would still be required for school buses by DESE. Dr. Kiessling commented that the CDC guidance allowed for students to go maskless while riding school buses.

Ms. Schwartz asked if masks were optional for all buses or just school buses. Dr. Kiessling replied that it was just for school buses. Public transportation still requires masks.

Ms. Porter commented that the data reported on the Dashboard may need to be adjusted given BOH changes in thought regarding use of CDC’s county-wide transmissivity data. The data shared with the BOH members could also be displayed on the Dashboard and includes hospitalizations for COVID-19, ICU occupancy, and vaccination rates. Ms. Porter added that the CDC is phasing out the transmissivity rate map and replacing it with the COVID-19 community level by county map. By this new map, Middlesex County is categorized as ‘low’.

Ms. Porter commented that cases continue to decrease over time, as are hospitalizations.

Ms. Schwartz commented that some people are still looking at transmission rates along with the new CDC map as part of their risk assessment. People were asked to do a risk assessment as part of the mitigation strategies and suggested having both pieces of information on the Dashboard. Ms. Porter commented that the CDC may discontinue the transmission rate map.

Dr. Kiessling commented that the transmission rate isn't reliable anymore due to the amount of transmission that isn't being reported, which is one of the reasons why the CDC put out the new map. Ms. Schwartz commented that Bedford's messaging should match the CDC messaging.

Ms. Richichi commented that it may confuse people to see 'high' on the transmission map, but a 'low' on the new community level map.

Ms. Porter recommended having just the community level on the Dashboard to avoid confusion. The transmission level map was referenced in connection with the mask mandate which is why that data point has been included on the Dashboard to date. She added that there will be work done on the Dashboard over the next few weeks and she can comment on the changes at a future BOH meeting.

Ms. Schwartz commented that the vaccination rates have been holding steady. Ms. Porter replied that Bedford could be at 80% if any unreported vaccinations were included and the population numbers as reported on the census were used.

Dr. Kiessling asked about analyzing the Middlesex County data from June to January and if there was an update on the project. Ms. Porter replied that as she understands it, Ms. Laura Nash will be taking the analysis on as a project as part of her Master's program. Ms. Nash is working with her advisor and has asked for links to additional data. Ms. Porter has asked Ms. Nash to keep her informed on the progress and hopes a presentation can be made to the BOH in the future. Dr. Kiessling commented that the dataset is unique since going forward, positivity rates won't be useful.

Dr. Kiessling asked if Ms. Nash was still working for the Health Department. Ms. Porter replied that for now she is still working for the Health Department, but an end date will be determined for the former interns and other contact tracers. Ms. Porter expects that date to be at the end of March or mid-April.

Dr. Kiessling suggested a high school student could help gather up the data to build up the set more. The current dataset is a week from each month from June through January, so the data for the rest of each month is needed. Dr. Kiessling added that she really wants the Middlesex County data to be reviewed.

Ms. Porter commented that the BOH members had discussed putting in place a mask advisory now that the mask mandate had been lifted. In preparation, Ms. Porter has updated the BOH recommended mitigation strategies, including a mask advisory. Ms. Richichi had suggested pulling out the mask advisory and making it a separate document since masking was the only

mandated part of the various mitigation strategies. Ms. Porter added that the drafts of both documents contain changes based on comments submitted by the BOH members.

Ms. Schwartz commented that she likes the mask advisory separate from the mitigation strategies. The advisory is focused on masking, while the mitigation strategies might need to be changed with time.

Ms. Richichi commented that the BOH had stated during the previous meeting that they would issue an advisory. She still has the opinion that it is important to keep it as a separate document.

Ms. Richichi commented that given the new CDC guidance, the first paragraph of the advisory could be changed to include a link to the new CDC COVID-19 Community Level map, as well as adding some language from the CDC. Ms. Richichi suggested the first paragraph: “To continue to keep SARS-CoV-2 community transmission low and to protect the vulnerable in our community (seniors, those with weakened immune systems, those at risk for severe illness due to underlying medical conditions, and children <5 years not eligible for vaccination), all persons (vaccinated and unvaccinated) are advised to wear masks or face coverings in indoor public settings.” becomes “In accordance with CDC COVID-19 Community Levels, the Bedford Board of Health advises individuals wear a face covering based on personal preference, informed by personal levels of risk. Residents are encouraged to consider wearing a mask indoors when in contact with someone at high risk for severe disease, seniors, those with weakened immune systems, those at risk for severe illness due to underlying medical conditions and children < 5 years not eligible for vaccination.”

Ms. Schwartz suggested that instead of listing the guidance for isolation and quarantine, a link should be included instead in case that guidance changes, as it has in the past. This suggestion would shorten the paragraph from “Individuals who are considered close contacts or who have tested positive must follow the isolation and quarantine guidance which includes wearing a mask in public for 5 more days after they leave isolation or quarantine on day 5, regardless of vaccination status.” to “Individuals who are considered close contacts or who have tested positive must follow isolation and quarantine guidance.” with a link to the guidance.

Ms. Richichi commented that the third paragraph of the advisory was included to make sure people understand that while Bedford is lifting its mask mandate, there are still places that require masks, such as public transportation and health care facilities.

Ms. Schwartz commented that under the Recommendations for Mask Wearing section, the wording should be changed from “For the best protection against COVID-19 and its variants, upgrade your face covering to an N95 or KN95 respirator.” to “For the best protection against COVID-19 and its variants, wear an N95 or KN95 respirator.”

Dr. Kiessling asked if the mask advisory was meant to be a single page. Ms. Richichi replied that it was to make sure it was succinct.

Ms. Raj commented that it may be a little confusing to have one document on all the mitigation strategies and then another focusing only on one mitigation strategy. Ms. Richichi commented that the mask advisory was what the BOH said it would do when the mask mandate was lifted.

Dr. Brunkhorst suggested that the mitigation strategy document could reference the mask advisory document. Ms. Richichi commented that the mitigation document includes a lot of the same information contained in the mask advisory.

Ms. Richichi commented that many of the community's BOH websites contained either a mask mandate or a mask advisory. Having the advisory separate would allow residents to see that the mask mandate has been replaced by the mask advisory.

Dr. Kiessling suggested the advisory should also include that people wear masks in accordance with the guidance of their physicians. The first sentence in the first paragraph was edited to include the suggestion: "...the Bedford Board of Health advises individuals wear a face covering based on personal preference, informed by personal levels of risk, and guidance from their health care provider." Ms. Schwartz commented that the inclusion of health care provider guidance was already included in the mitigation strategy document.

Dr. Kiessling asked if a link for the definition of a close contact should also be included. Ms. Richichi replied that close contact information is included in the link for the quarantine and isolation guidance information.

Ms. Porter moved on to the mitigation strategies document and commented that these strategies have been recommended for some time.

Dr. Brunkhorst asked about the inclusion of the J & J vaccine and if the FDA still recommends it. Ms. Porter replied that the J & J vaccine is still available.

Dr. Kiessling commented that the first two bullet points discussing vaccination should be deleted. Residents should follow their health care provider's advice regarding getting the vaccine series. Dr. Kiessling added that vaccination has a complicated debate surrounding it. Ms. Porter replied that vaccination is a widely promoted public health recommendation. Dr. Kiessling replied that the vaccine series guidance has changed and residents should be encouraged to follow their health care providers' guidance. The mitigation strategy regarding vaccinations should encourage vaccination, but doesn't need to include the number of doses.

Dr. Kiessling commented that vaccination has been shown to reduce the severity of the disease, but the effect on transmission is still being discussed, as well as how many doses are needed, citing Israel dropping their fourth dose recommendation.

Dr. Brunkhorst suggested that the vaccination recommendation by the CDC should be included, as well as a bullet point for people to follow their health care guidance. Ms. Richichi added that vaccination is still the best mitigation strategy for reducing the severity of the disease.

Ms. Schwartz suggested that vaccination be made the section title with the two bullet points as discussed included in that section. The first section of the mitigation strategy changed from "Get Vaccinated with 2 doses of Pfizer or Moderna or one dose of J&J. Get an mRNA Booster if it has been 5 months since your 2nd dose of Pfizer or Moderna or 2 months since your J&J dose. Follow your health care provider's guidance regarding your vaccine series, including, if recommended, a fourth dose." to "Per CDC's guidance, COVID-19 vaccination has been demonstrated to prevent

severe disease. Follow your health care provider's guidance regarding receiving a COVID-19 vaccine series, additional doses, and boosters.” A link to vaccination locations was also included in this section.

Dr. Kiessling supported the inclusion of the ‘Have a Plan’ section of the mitigation strategy document. Ms. Richichi commented that information regarding the current quarantine and isolation guidance should be included since many people home test and may not contact their doctor after testing positive to receive the latest guidance, or the doctor may not go into detail on the current guidance.

Ms. Raj suggested that the Bedford BOH could be contacted for current isolation and quarantine guidance could be included. Ms. Schwartz commented that contacting the BOH is included further in the document regarding what to do if a person tests positive. Ms. Schwartz added that the purpose of this section was to encourage residents to talk to their health care provider about anything special for that person. Each person is different, so their plans will differ. This section also encourages residents to talk to other household members on what to do if others in the household get sick.

Dr. Kiessling asked why COVID-19 testing was recommended before gathering with unvaccinated individuals. Dr. Brunkhorst commented that it might reference children under five who can’t get vaccinated yet. Dr. Kiessling commented that children under five aren’t at risk. Ms. Porter commented it could refer to older unvaccinated people.

Ms. Schwartz suggested removing unvaccinated individuals from the first sentence under COVID-19 Testing, changing it from “Test before visiting or attending an indoor event or gathering with unvaccinated individuals, older individuals, those with weakened immune systems, and those at risk of severe illness.” to “Test before visiting or attending an indoor event or gathering with older individuals, those with weakened immune systems and those at risk of severe illness.”

Ms. Porter commented that any changes made earlier in the meeting to the mask advisory will be included in the ‘Wear a Face Covering in Public Indoor Spaces’ section of the mitigation strategy document.

Dr. Kiessling stressed the importance of testing if symptomatic, especially if a person plans on attending or hosting a gathering. A person should stay home and test negative before attending or hosting a gathering. Ms. Richichi commented that it is possible a person tests too early and gets a negative result. Dr. Kiessling replied that a person almost never tests negative before getting symptoms and symptoms start three to five days into an infection. Dr. Kiessling added that home tests tend to have more false positives than false negatives.

Based upon suggested edits, Ms. Porter amended the bullet point “If you are Sick or have Symptoms of COVID-19, don’t host or attend a gathering. Stay home.” to “If you are Sick or have Symptoms of COVID-19, take a COVID-19 test and don’t host or attend a gathering unless you test negative.”

Prior to the meeting, Ms. Schwartz asked Ms. Porter to include recommending people to stay connected with one another since isolation has caused mental health concerns. This was included

in the ‘Isolate’ section for people to postpone in-person interactions and to leverage remote opportunities for people to stay connected.

Ms. Schwartz commented that she also looked at other communities' mitigation strategies, including from other countries, where she found the ‘General Well-Being’ section. Ms. Richichi liked the inclusion of the point that the BOH can connect residents who are feeling isolated or suffering from loss to social services resources.

Dr. Kiessling asked about the point to “Monitor your health daily.” Ms. Schwartz replied it could be as simple as asking yourself ‘How am I feeling today?’ Dr. Kiessling commented that the other three bullets in the ‘General Well-Being’ section cover the first bullet point.

Ms. Raj suggested deleting the “Monitor your health daily.” bullet point, but keep the other points. Dr. Brunkhorst agreed. Dr. Kiessling added that the bullet point sounds like it suggests taking your temperature each morning, which isn’t necessary.

Dr. Brunkhorst suggested changing the order of some of the sections. She suggested the ‘Isolate’ section should be moved under the ‘Have a Plan’ section.

Ms. Richichi suggested that the ‘If You Are Sick’ section should also be moved up under the ‘Have a Plan’ section. Ms. Schwartz commented that the ‘Have a Plan’ section is proactive and the other two sections moved up are reactive, so it makes sense to organize the sections that way.

Dr. Kiessling asked about the school testing program and commented that she had received communication from parents saying that vaccinated children aren’t being encouraged to test. Ms. Porter replied that the schools are participating in the pool testing program, as well as an at-home testing program. Each week, the Superintendent encourages participation in both programs. The programs include both students and staff and vaccination status doesn’t affect the ability to participate in either program. Ms. Porter added that vaccination status only affected participation in the test-and-stay program, which was replaced with the at-home testing program.

Dr. Kiessling asked about what happens if a school pool tests positive. Ms. Porter replied that the individuals from the positive pool were retested. Ms. Richichi commented that two swabs are usually taken, one for the pool and one for individual testing. Ms. Porter added that in January, the labs were so backed up that the schools used very small pools for testing and then rapid tested the individuals in a positive pool. Ms. Porter assumed that the previous method of two swabs has been put back into effect now that the surge in cases has ended.

Ms. Porter commented that students and staff were asked to test yesterday before returning to school today after the break. Dr. Brunkhorst commented that there were two cases reported in Davis School. Ms. Porter replied that those cases could be reported during the break.

Dr. Kiessling asked about the home testing through the schools. Ms. Raj replied that students and staff are provided a test kit to use at home and asked to test a few days after the pool testing done in the schools.

Ms. Porter commented that there are two testing opportunities through the school. Test kits are also available through Bedford to residents.

Dr. Kiessling asked if the school nurses were performing the pool testing. Ms. Porter replied that the CIC, which runs the program, provides support staff to help with the testing.

Ms. Raj suggested the mitigation strategy document encourage parents who have not signed their students up for either the pool testing or home testing programs to sign up and include the link with the information.

Dr. Kiessling asked how beneficial the school testing programs have been in keeping the schools open. Ms. Porter replied that the testing programs give two opportunities to identify positive cases and keep them home.

Dr. Kiessling asked if there was any data on whether the school testing programs have kept classrooms from being quarantined. Ms. Porter replied that there is no data on that yet. Ms. Raj added that the test-and-stay program allowed for students to stay in school. Ms. Porter commented that now students and staff stay in school unless they test positive. Ms. Richichi added that the schools aren't identifying close contacts anymore.

Dr. Kiessling commented that while she supports testing, she wants to know more on how valuable the programs have been before advocating for the programs, especially with the amount of work that is involved. Ms. Richichi commented that the BOH has told the schools to follow the DESE guidelines, and these programs are part of the DESE guidelines. It will be up to DESE to evaluate the data from the programs to determine how valuable they have been. Ms. Richichi added that it is under the BOH purview to recommend that for students and staff, there are programs available for testing.

Ms. Schwartz commented that every week, the Superintendent encourages participation in the school testing programs. By recommending participation, the BOH is supporting the school's actions.

Ms. Schwartz suggested language to encourage both students and staff to participate in the school testing programs. Dr. Kiessling suggested: "Participate in the Bedford Public Schools COVID-19 testing program." Ms. Schwartz commented that the language would cover both students and staff.

Ms. Richichi suggested combining the first two sentences at the beginning of the mitigation strategies document to remove redundancy. When combined, the opening sentence of the document became: "The Bedford Board of Health continues to promote the following public health strategies for all Bedford community members to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic:".

Ms. Raj asked about the presentation on the COVID-19 vaccine facts. Dr. Brunkhorst replied that she had collected information from the CDC so people could understand where the CDC stands regarding COVID-19 vaccine side effects compared to the effects of COVID-19 illness. Ms. Porter commented that if more discussion on the subject is wanted, the topic can be added to the agenda for next week's BOH meeting. Dr. Brunkhorst agreed to have the discussion next week.

Ms. Richichi made the motion to adopt the Board of Health COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies as of February 28th, 2022, and the Bedford Board of Health Advisory Regarding Face Coverings and

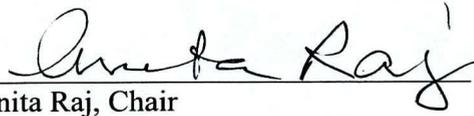
Masks as of February 28th, 2022. Dr. Brunkhorst seconded the motion. A roll call vote of 5-0-0 adopted both documents.

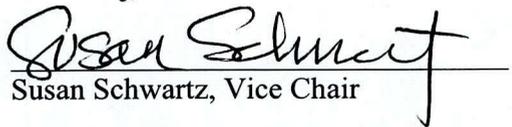
At 7:03 PM, Dr. Kiessling moved to adjourn the meeting of February 28th, 2022. Ms. Richichi seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 5-0-0.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

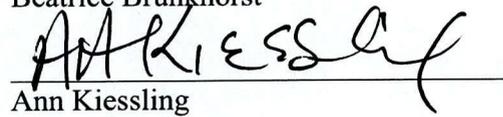
- Monthly COVID-19 Data Since August for Bedford, Middlesex County, and Region
- Draft of Bedford BOH COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies
- Draft of Bedford BOH Advisory Regarding Face Coverings and Masks
- Facts About the COVID-19 Vaccine Provided by Dr. Brunkhorst

The next scheduled meetings of the Board of Health are March 7th, March 21st, April 11th, April 25th, May 9th, May 23rd, June 13th, and June 27th.


Anita Raj, Chair


Susan Schwartz, Vice Chair


Beatrice Brunkhorst


Ann Kiessling


Maureen Richichi