

### **Scott introductory remarks**

- COVID is not going away but we have better tools to manage
- So important we work to remedy some of the harms caused by the mitigation measures we had to put in place before we had these tools: learning loss, strain on educators and health care providers, mental & SUD health impacts
- Addressing these impacts is a high priority
- AHS and DOE will share some of what they are focused on and goals for recovery

Commissioner Shirling, Department of Public Safety – last meeting before he leaves for role at UVM

### **Jenney Samuelson, Agency of Human Services**

- We have reached a new phase of the pandemic where risk of disease and death are much lower
- Important for our wellbeing where we have now reached the phase we can socialize, see neighbors
- We are now focused on COVID-related impacts of our mitigation measures on housing, childcare, healthcare, mental health
- Top Priorities:
  - o Increased substance use and acute mental health challenges
  - o Further stabilize health care system and workforce
  - o Need to support challenges to families and children, including housing instability
- We improve what we measure; we will be measuring:
  - o Number of Vermonters seeing acute mental health services; deaths from suicide and overdose
  - o Beds in health care facilities that are staffed and ready for Vermonters – hospitals, mental health facilities, LTC
  - o Number in hospitals and EDs waiting to discharge to skilled nursing or other facilities
  - o Track households in emergency housing program and ability to move to more permanent housing solutions
- Efforts have been underway in these areas, for example:
  - o 988 nationwide crisis line
  - o S. 11 health care workforce investments
  - o Investments in housing

### **Dan French, Agency of Education**

- have federally funded relief efforts remaining – need to make sure they have a long-term impact
- \$280 million remaining – 10% to state DOE, 90% to school districts – came out last spring, need to spend in 2 years
- Every school district now has a recovery plan – posted on their website
- 10% state funds should be used in a strategic manner – for example, statewide supports for HVAC improvements
- Immediate goals:
  - o Student academic needs, especially due to learning loss – tutoring, summer programs, remote instructional programs
  - o Impact on social-emotional needs of students – wellness program for staff

- Long term goals
  - o Each school district has strong & consistent instructional systems like curriculum development, professional development
  - o Integration of education and social services for youth
- Will be looking at existing metrics, especially SBAC testing in elementary level, high school metrics (% 3+ on AP exams, % completing career-technical program)

### Mark Levine, MD, Vermont Department of Health

- o Cases
  - o End of last week, statewide COVID-19 levels were “low” and trajectory continues in this direction
    - Based on case count, new hospital admissions and percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by patients with COVID-19
    - <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/covid-19-activity-and-surveillance>
  - o 7 day hospitalization average is 35, ICU is 4
  - o 1 death to date in June
  - o ED visits with symptoms decreasing
  - o Trends continue to show disease severity is less in those testing positive
- o Vaccine updates
  - o Pfizer & Moderna have submitted data on vaccine for children under 5; FDA committee meeting today and tomorrow; we do expect a favorable review but awaiting final FDA decision and CDC recommendation
  - o Vaccines will likely be available before the end of June, possibly as soon as June 20
  - o Will largely be at pediatrician and other health care provider offices
  - o Some options to WIC families and walk-in clinics that will be listed on the website (no registration needed)
  - o Visit: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/vaccine/vaccines-children>
  - o Also anticipate some update information on boosters for the fall
- o Testing
  - o State run testing sites closing June 25<sup>th</sup> – end of next week
  - o No longer a necessity as tools to prevent COVID have evolved
  - o Widely available at pharmacies and online
  - o Order 3 rounds from the federal government
  - o Pick up tests from state sites before the 25<sup>th</sup>
  - o If you can't find them elsewhere after the 25<sup>th</sup> call the Health Dept
- o Understand this is stressful for those at-risk or in vulnerable populations, but we can now see COVID-19 as a disease we have the tools to fight – vaccines, treatment, testing
- o While it looks like we are slowing or stepping back, this is not the case, we are stepping forward as the science evolves
- o Expanding our focus beyond COVID to look at the negative impacts of living in a pandemic and moving to recovery – SUD, mental health, food insecurity, eating disorders, academic success, health behaviors

**Questions:**

**We are 1 year to a day from hitting 80% immunization. What have we learned?**

Scott: we have learned a great deal – remember in the beginning we didn't even know how it was transmitted, can't say enough about how Vermonters listened and followed guidance; ML: we have had to create new plans, respond differently to each variant – has created transitions and stress – have needed communication, transparency

**Are we at a point where COVID is endemic?**

ML: yes, we are transitioning to that – have to all work with each other as we make this transition

**Are you worried about cases coming back this summer?**

ML: risk seems to be very low right now and this summer – get outside, do things, interact – BA2 seems to have been through our population

**Comments on safe injection sites for opioid overdose prevention?**

ML: Opioid overdose has been a problem in our state from before the pandemic, we had been making harm reduction successes and were making progress before the pandemic – Narcan distribution, fentanyl test strips, syringe exchange, buprenorphine decriminalization; data on safe injection sites is growing but site locations are very different than a rural state like Vermont – using them as a major strategy may not be as successful here with dispersed population and services – we will continue to use the strategies we have been using

**Comments on increased concerns about gun violence in school and threats that have come up in Vermont?**

Scott: yes, understands the concern and number of threats are up, there are copycat situations – we want students to say something if they see or hear anything – we want people to feel comfortable reaching out to school officials or law enforcement; French – Vermont does have robust school safety program, threat assessment system – right now that is voluntary, considering making mandatory, assessing school safety plans

**Is the expectation that there will not be another spike in the fall and winter like we did last year? Seems like we're confident we will not have another spike.**

Scott: this might be a misunderstanding of our optimism – we are focused on right now, this summer – I would expect this fall as we head indoors, we see other variants, the numbers will increase again – ML agrees with this

**Are there any updates on mandatory immunization in children for the new school year?**

Dan French – the immunization committee has not met since the winter – so no update on this now