

COVID Update

- Have a slight uptick in cases, wouldn't use the word surge and doesn't look like we will have a surge
- Whole NE is seeing an increase in cases, prolonged tail end of curve and not a straight up peak
- Hospitalizations have increased, but not increasing out of control
 - In the 20/25 range
 - Only seeing a few people in the ICU
- Testing is going up – uptick in antigen testing, decline in PCR, Rapid PCR testing has slightly increased
- Percent positivity has increased
- Vaccine Booster
 - FDA said people may get a booster if they want, especially if they're 65+ or 50+ with immunocompromised conditions
 - CDC Director came out with similar language, but in her statement said it's especially important if you're 65+ or 50+ with underlying medical conditions
 - Today Europe with the WHO, did not warmly endorse getting the 2nd booster. Israel will continue offering the 2nd booster
 - Advisory committee to FDA met yesterday in a discussion capacity
 - There is a lot of different opinions on the 2nd booster

Opioid Report

- Worst year in history for unintentional opioid deaths
 - Pandemic played a roll in this. Year prior was lower.
- Everything has fentanyl (cocaine, a counterfeit pill, etc.) and you may die if you: take it; are not accustomed to it; and are alone where you cannot be resuscitated
- There are things going on in the program at a prevention angle with VPMS, protecting kids from developing a substance misuse order, or accessibility of treatment/recovery services, syringe service programs.
- Hopefully, we will be able to get to people to programming that they enjoyed before where 1) they didn't feel afraid to leave their house 2) didn't feel like they had to be alone when they injected 3) and had sufficient Narcan to deal with potential overdoses

Questions and Answers

Understanding the complexity of the 2nd booster issue, I was a little surprised (disappointed) to hear the Governor's approach to this at Tuesday briefing-saying that "for people who are getting COVID now, it seems to be pretty mild" - may not be inaccurate, but may not help encourage those who aren't yet vaxxed or UTD.

ML: Reality is that there is no position right now. People have to understand that this is not clear cut on whether everyone should get the 2nd booster, but if it wouldn't provide harm and could be beneficial you can get it. It is complicated. They have our permission to get the booster, but if you're 30 and healthy the incremental benefit may be close to zero.

Do you personally or from the Health Dept have stronger guidance? And any comment about prevention of “long covid” by vaccine?

ML: We’ll come out with something that is better framed, but again I can’t say it will be stronger guidance because it is hard to very warmly endorse a 2nd booster. It’s an incremental benefit, but if you believe that most people will get omicron, the goal is to protect against serious outcome. We don’t want people to think only a 2nd booster will prevent serious outcomes, when the 1st booster is doing that. Guidance about long covid is challenging because we are still learning about it. But can’t say with conviction that you won’t have long COVID with vaccine.

On another non-covid topic, was just hearing suicide death data from VDH and not surprised, but saddened, to see that VT had the highest number of suicide deaths in 2021

ML: I think that’s referring to VTs highest number of suicide deaths, never looked good on national stage of suicide, but at any rate it’s on our radar. Speaks to what we’ve been talking about because no one’s mental health has been alright due to the pandemic. Recent CDC publications speak to the significance that distress, anxiety, depression, and PTSD has played in our population and in the health care work force. Health department also sees the adverse health behaviors in general (nutrition, exercise, etc.). There’s a lot of repair work to be done and it will take a long time to get back to where we were pre-pandemic, let alone a better place.