

COVID-19

- Almost irrelevant to look at cases since PCR testing so low
- Hospital numbers show stability, a slight increase in admissions, less than 7 per 100,000; % of beds occupied by COVID is 2.3% (about 50% because of COVID, 50% happen to have COVID)
- 4 deaths in last week, continue 4-8 deaths per week, continue to be most vulnerable – quite elderly, abundant comorbidities, COVID tends to be contributory not only cause
- XBB.1.5 continues to be major variant, does not seem to be more virulent, just more transmissible
- All of wastewater with 2 exceptions showed decreases last week – Burlington showed sites very low
- Outbreaks only in LTC since school was on break
- Met with HHS in DC last week – a lot of discussion on the federal PHE
 - Discussion on wanting to continue free supply of vaccines and testing - though can't be free once draw down federal stockpile
 - Very aware of these issues and how we want to maintain access for uninsured population
 - How testing should look in the future – why shouldn't Americans be able to figure out with a home test if they have RSV, COVID, flu – that is a shared vision but how to actually get there is unclear
 - H5N1 – Avian flu – have been impacting flocks around the country as well as in VT – still have several months to go when virus can be flourishing; agriculture seriously considering widespread vaccination of flocks to help prevent spread to people; but CDC perspective is only 9 cases worldwide of humans contracting and seems unlikely to be person to person transmission
- Question: is VDH considering covering COVID-19 vaccines through state vaccine purchasing program? ML: will need to ask internally; FDA still on a pathway to identifying an annual COVID vaccine booster in June/July timeframe and having it available later in the year; still unknown if this is going to evolve into a seasonal illness or more periodic but when other respiratory illnesses are not common

Opioid Overdose Prevention

- Decisions made this week on first year of funding coming into the state
- Hope to be several million dollars per year going forward
- Portfolio of harm reduction strategies, finding more people who need treatment/improving access to treatment
- 75% of overdose deaths are those who have never touched the treatment system – have no knowledge of them until they died – this is tragic – a lot of the strategies have this in mind
- VDH makes recommendations to legislature appropriations committee
- Hope legislature follows advice

AHS priorities continue to be mental health of the population and SUD

- Continue to work on systems of care – hub and spoke, improving the Blueprint, more screening for SUD

- DAIL full steam ahead on working on LTC facilities for those with complex needs, unable to discharge elsewhere – on target to open in summer
 - Question: can you give more details on location? ML: doesn't have details, either, but agreement has been signed, this is not constructing a new facility but in a pre-existing facility – contact involves iCare (<https://www.icarehn.com/>) - Devon: DAIL will be at VAHHS meeting next week to give an update

Medical Operations Network call brought up staffing challenges – unclear if vacation or illness related – more feedback on this?

NVRH: not getting a lot of applications so still using travelers, but cost of travelers is coming down fairly dramatically