

VMS Notes on Governor Scott Press Conference from Tuesday 6.15.21

Mike Smith – 80 percent vaccinated

59 clinics being offered this week

Most pharmacy's are offering walk-in clinics

Long list of pop-up walk-in clinics – walk-in and get your shot today

Phasing out motel-hotel system for homeless. Utilizations have increased significantly since June, we project that 2/3 of families housed in hotels will be eligible for 84 days for vulnerable families with children

We have worked with stakeholders and have agreed on an intentional phased program – intending to avoid a cliff – phased in new eligibility beginning in July. Eligible households particularly families with children, older Vermonters and those with disability.

Households may be eligible for an essential payment of \$2500 – to help them basic needs. Households may qualify for rental assistance for up to 12 months

Rapid resolution housing solution – families may be eligible for up to \$8,000 in housing supports

DCF will be able to provide the maximum emergency allotment for 3 squares extra food benefits – stream went out – now back up

Doing everything VT can to make sure permanent housing solutions are possible

“Massive technical difficulties (Jane Lindholm)”

Commissioner Pieciak: seeing cases fall consistently in all age groups – the further the median age cases now stands at 32. With COVID-19 improving in the US – here is Canadian update – CAN saw a significant surge in the Spring however over the last 4 weeks – the vaccine rate has increased and now its cases have decreased by 75% - at 68% now – so in a few weeks we should be good. Cases dramatically decreasing – cases continue to look good over the region – New England leads the nation in vaccination. We are closely watching and all 6 states have fully reopened in New England – pointing to an enjoyable and safe summer.

Commissioner Levine:

Well, it's been quite a while since we have had back to back press briefings. One of the tricky things about public health – it is never gone. Even with our benchmark announcement yesterday, we have to do everything we can not to lose ground. Meeting the 80 percent benchmark means fewer sick people and fewer hospitalizations and deaths. Very happy about Vermont's response but still 1 in 5 Vermonters have not gotten vaccinated. Another reason is the Delta variant – now 10 percent of cases in VT. First identified in India is showing traits of being far more contagious even here in Vermont. Our lab is now able to do whole genome sequencing. We had one who was an international traveler and another that was a domestic traveler. We know how to stop it vaccination and a health dose of health behaviors. Also okay to move forward with our prevention tactics. Now without masks – it is a transitional period and you may be more comfortable wearing them and go ahead. But remind – if you choose to wear a mask or not – don't judge. Kids are in a gray area – kids under 12 we still recommend that you wear masks indoors. We may get to a point in Vermont where the case counts are so low our guidance will change that. Thank you again for your trust and confidence.

Gov. Scott – nationwide trends – importantly vaccines are the best defense against this – if you haven't got your shot it is important that you do so. As has been the case – the FDA has extended the shelf life

of J&J by 6 months. I want to thank Vermonters for your hard work and meeting the 80%. The people we vaccinate tomorrow are just as important as vaccinating the people before. The EO – today the State of Emergency will expire – Governors can issue a SOE – this one has been unique because we haven't seen the likes of COVID in our lifetime. As a result of Vermonters stepping up, the SOE and restrictions are no longer needed. We want to make sure that Vermonters dependent on the programs will be extended so I have issued an Executive Order that will:

Extend the service of the National Guard

Extends the housing and food assistance

H.313 – keeps portion of restaurants and bars to keep serving drinks to go – law goes into effect July 1.

Protecting the most vulnerable has been the highest priority over the last 4 years.

Questions:

\$2500 transitional stipend – what kind of checks will ensure that it is spent on housing?

C. Brown – this is an essential payment – so can be used on other household needs. They really have financial flexibility.

30-days the Courts will open – is that good?

Scott: Continue to have protections in place and have faith in the third branch of government

Have you been sharing your vaccination strategies with other governors?

Scott: I have been but every State has its own strategies. But we certainly have offered our assistance. It has a lot to do with our attitude.

Lifting all remaining restrictions means no masks, no limits on space?

Scott: Go back to where we were 16 months ago – except for maybe LTCF

146 press conferences to this point.

Levine: If someone has any symptoms of COVID – it would be recommended to get a test. The odds are that it is a common cold but we do want to protect each other so get tested. 16 or 17 fixed testing sites – take advantage for piece of mind.

Congratulations and I want to recognize that every single bit of information requested has been provided thank you.

We have heard parents are having a hard time finding slots for summer programs?

Scott: I think it is more regionalized and there maybe more opportunities we have not heard of too.

Is COVID going to be a disease that is around forever?

Levine: You probably don't want me to say yes – but when doctor's test for viruses COVID will be one of them.

Did you miss any of the 146 press conferences? Do you have a vacation planned?

Scott: we each missed one. And no travel plans for either of us any time soon.

What can you do to speed up the opening of the border? It would have a huge economic impact?

Scott: I don't have any details but it appears there will be a meeting btw US and CAN officials. I am speculating that this could happen mid-July. We keep the pressure up – it is more on the Canadian side

but they have made significant ground of first doses in the 60 % range. Just needs to get shots in arms. Continue to do our part in a small way.

What about boosters?

Levine: Keep in mind the people in the original clinical trials were a year ago – and the antibody levels will determine when we need a booster. We could need a booster in 1 yr – but if its not a year – it could be where you only get a few in a lifetime. Scott: Congress said there will be an ACIP meeting on Friday on boosters.

Broadband - \$150m – people are wondering when we are going to get our broadband?

Scott: the legislature put in oversight and there will be an Executive Director of a Board – but we are doing everything we can to get fiber on poles and in the ground. We are hoping this funding will be used in this infrastructure and the CUS will be used as a non-profit regionally?

Question on the expiration of the eviction moratorium – will this mean evictions and no housing set up for these people?

C. Hannaford – eviction moratorium is up July 15th – rent was never forgiven during this time and there is more than \$375 million for rental assistance. So, we feel we have the resources in place to help folks – you need to submit the necessary paperwork. The eviction process is a lengthy one and can be reversed at any time by paying back rent. There is more work to do in this area – but it will take time. Scott: Don't forget that when we had \$37 million in housing bond that brought in \$65 million for a \$100 million in total, so we do have housing being built right now. We also sought to expedite some permitting during the legislative session – we weren't successful but if that's a problem we will ask for this again.

What would you have done different 16-24 months ago to respond to this pandemic?

Scott: I think we did the best we could based on the tools we had. But our country did have some problematic responses that could have been different. We are going to have to invest more in science and having all of the PPE. I wished we had more manufacturing ability right here in the US. I remember having to go to great lengths just to find PPE. Levine: not too much to add. I think we learned perhaps as a State – it is not a good situation to compete with 50 states and other countries too. Any time that we have 256 that are no longer with us. I wish we could have saved them. The virus spread so fast in nursing homes – very challenging questions. I do think having a stockpile of reliable PPE is really important. Our state learned so much along the way about diversifying our supply lines. The ultimate answer is to have a country that is way more invested in public health and preparedness. We need to make sure we remember that viruses like the coronavirus are in our future.

Do you know which services you will be able to draw down?

Scott: FEMA funding for housing services and HHS funding for 3 Squares for feeding people.

The Emergency order will lapse tonight and the new Executive order will extend the funding so there are no program lapses. There is an end date – like the \$300 supplemental UI will end in September. The National Guard will continue to be activated as long as we need them.

Essex cty is still only vaccinated at 56% - does this concern you?

Scott: yes this concerns me but maybe as time goes on they will see that others can enjoy a more comfortable life. It is rural and not too many people would get it to 80%, but we will continue our efforts.

Talking to the North Country Hospital has not been getting the Pfizer vaccine?

Scott: that would surprise me but tell that Administrator to give us a call. Sec. Smith would be most appropriate. Levine: the number could be higher – we are rectifying the data right now. More to come.

Can an employer fire someone for not getting vaccinated at this point?

J. Johnson – the EUA makes it unclear and I don't know of any litigation testing it. I am hoping one it is authorized that would be the theory? It will be a real-life test.