

TETON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING MINUTES

June 16, 2021

Present: Ken Bassmann, Melissa Moyer, Randy Morris, Sam Carlson, Lin Wright, and Elaine Sedlack.

Absent: Austin Moyer, Barb Shaffer, and Tim Sinton.

Guests: Lora Wier, Melody Martinson (Choteau Acantha), Aden Vermeersch, (AmeriCorps Volunteer), Lucas Rodriguez (AmeriCorps Volunteer), Marcia Kelly, Mike Maples (Choteau Public Works Director), and Levi Warhime (Choteau Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator).

The meeting was called to order by Melissa Moyer at 8:04 am in the Choteau County Courthouse Annex Conference Room.

Public Comment: No members of the public were present.

Approval of Minutes: Initially no quorum was present, but Randy came in late giving us a quorum. The minutes of the March 17, 2021, meeting were reviewed. Randy moved the minutes be approved as written. The motion was seconded by Ken and approved unanimously.

Old Business:

Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA): Melissa reported the assessment was completed on time with the help of the Yarrow Group who wrote the final report. As previously noted in the March 17, 2021, meeting minutes, the 3 priorities identified in the CHNA were 1. Mental Health, 2. Thriving Families (building resiliency), and 3. Health Communications (with county residents). Melissa pointed out this is not a Teton County Health Department plan but a community wide plan involving schools, health care providers, etc. In response to a question from Ken she said specific metrics will be tracked to determine the effectiveness of the plan. It will be redone in 3 years.

New Business:

Health Department Updates:

COVID-19 Updates:

Wastewater COVID-19 Program: Mike Maples, Choteau Public Works Director and Levi Warhime, Choteau Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator discussed the COVID-19 viral load testing they have been doing. They brought graphs of the viral load tests in relation to community members testing positive for COVID-19. Generally, the spike in viral loads in the wastewater occurred about 2 weeks before spikes in positive COVID-19 tests in community members. Initially the CARES Act paid for the testing which cost \$780/test and they were testing every 2 weeks. When that money ran out the City of Choteau paid for the tests which

had reduced in price to \$380/sample. In March 2021 they were testing every 3 weeks. In April there were no variants identified and they quit testing after that due to the cost and decrease of positive COVID-19 cases in the local area. They were sending the tests on Monday and getting results on Wednesday. They noted that bigger communities used the data to plan for surges and make decision regarding staffing, etc. but Teton County is unable to do that with its limited resources. Ken commented it would be nice to have the data, but the testing needs to be done a minimum of every 2 weeks to be useful and it would be better if the wastewater testing data could be compared just to cases occurring in Choteau and not the whole of Teton County. Teton County Health Department only reports countywide cases rather than by city. Lucas suggested doing a wastewater test around the 4th of July to see what impact visitors have. It was suggested doing a test 2 weeks before the 4th of July and another on July 5th to predict a possible surge in COVID-19 cases related to the 4th of July activities which bring many people from all over to Choteau. Lora thought that if people knew of the COVID-19 viral load in the wastewater they might be more responsive to recommendations from the health department, but Melissa said she was not sure that would change people's behavior.

Communicable Disease Response Staff: Melissa introduced Marcia Kelly, LPN, who started work in April and is doing communicable disease work. Melissa said Sue Shilling retired in May and Dawn Baker is retiring this summer. Melissa said she wants to hire a nurse in August. She distributed graphs tracking cases reported to date in Teton County. There have been 6 COVID-19 related deaths and 508 cases. The peak occurred in November, 2020 through January, 2021. Most cases were in the 50- to 69-year-olds. In Teton County this represents a total of 8,264 cases per 100,000 as compared to the state which had 1,647 deaths and 112,949 cases for a rate of 10,452 cases per 100,000. There was an uptick in cases in May involving Fairfield and Greenfield schools. Greenfield closed 1 week early for the summer. She pointed out that in small schools 1 sick student can impact a lot of students and staff. The May cases were related to proms, sports tournaments, and people generally letting their guard down. She hopes to get more youth vaccinated during the summer. Melissa said there have not been any cases in the past week. Testing results are usually reported out in 1 day and rapid tests are available. The 2nd highest number of cases has been occurring in the 10–19-year-old group and are school related. Ken thought it would be helpful to break down the cases reported by city, but Melissa said it would not affect the health department activities or response.

COVID-19 Vaccination Update: Aden reported on the vaccination situation in Teton County and distributed graphs showing percentage of people receiving 1st and 2nd doses and relevant age groups. He said 36% of county residents are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 including over 70% of people over 60. Lately the response to the vaccine clinics has dropped off. He said it is harder to

communicate the need to younger adults and to people who had COVID-19. The vaccine will protect people who already had the disease from variants such as the Delta variant which is more virulent, transmits faster and results in more hospitalizations. For herd immunity 65 to 70% of the population needs to be vaccinated. He said generally there has been a good local return of people needing the second dose. All people due for their second dose are reminded 1 week before their due date and if they don't show up additional reminders are given. Some people may be sick on the day their second dose is due and some have falsely heard that the second dose is more dangerous. Aden said he has gotten money from the Benefis Teton Medical Center Foundation to offer incentives to people to get vaccinated and he will begin in July. He thinks some people may come for the incentive at first, but it doesn't change the trend. Most people hear by word of mouth. He said one local employer has refused to give sick leave to an employee who gets COVID-19 after refusing to get the vaccine. He has offered to do vaccination clinics at work sites, but 2 large local employers have refused on site clinics and even refused to recommend vaccination to its employees (3 Rivers Communications and Mountain View CO-OP). Aden also said only the Pfizer Vaccine is approved for use in youth aged 12 and older. Melissa pointed out that when school starts COVID-19 will be treated like any other vaccine preventable disease like measles or pertussis. If a child in the school gets COVID, any unvaccinated child or staff member having contact with that child will be quarantined. If vaccinated they will not be quarantined. It was suggested she work with school booster clubs to get kids vaccinated.

PHEP (Public Health Emergency Preparedness Plans): Lora pointed out HB121 and HB 257 passed in the recent state legislative session impacts PHEP plans dealing with the powers of boards of health. The county attorney will have to review the legislation and advise how to rewrite the plans. Lora is hoping the public health summer institute will discuss the issue.

Health Communications Initiative: Lucas reported on the health information committee which includes schools, Melody Martinson of the Choteau Acantha, local city government, etc. Their goal is to develop a strategy to communicate accurate health information to county residents. They plan to survey 210 households on 2 days in July to determine how people currently get their health information. Volunteers will be trained to go door to door in preselected cluster areas throughout the county. Each area will have local volunteers who people may recognize and therefore be more willing to take the survey. The survey is one page on both sides and will be advertised ahead of time.

Handle With Care: Lucas is getting this program started. It allows the sheriff to send confidential incident information involving a school child to the child's school so the staff will be aware that the child may need help dealing with a difficult issue affecting them. The information is brief, not detailed, only that something

has happened in that child's family that may affect their behavior. Deb Coverdell, County EMS Director, would notify a school if an ambulance run was involved with a child's family.

Sanitarian Updates: In Austin's absence Melissa reported he has finished his school inspections. There were questions about how the school food programs would be run next year but that is unknown at this time. He has had a lot of temporary food permit requests and food truck inspection requests and expects it to be very busy over the 4th of July holiday. He also had a run on septic permit approvals this spring before the price increased or a shortage of supplies developed. Randy said he had a lot of requests for septic excavations earlier this spring but now he is getting cancellations because the cost of supplies has jumped up and people want to wait until the prices go down again. He doesn't think they will go down much. Austin will be checking pools now that they are all open for the summer.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 am. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be Wednesday, September 15, 2021, in the Teton County Courthouse Annex Conference Room at 8:00 am or via ZOOM depending on the COVID-19 Pandemic situation.

Tim Sinton, P.A., Chairman

Elaine Sedlack, Secretary