

Pima County Board of Health Minutes

March 25, 2020

Abrams Building, Room 1108 – **Teleconference Meeting Only Due to COVID-19 Pandemic**

3950 S. Country Club Road

Tucson, Arizona 85714

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Dr. Horwitz called the meeting to order at 3:00 P.M.

Attendance was as follows:

Board Members:

Mr. Bin An – Absent

Mr. Richard Elías

Mr. Rene Gastelum – Absent

Mr. Charles Geoffrion, Vice President

Ms. Mary Lou Gonzales – Absent

Dr. Paul Horwitz, President

Mr. Mike Humphrey

Dr. Kathryn Kohler

Mr. Miguel Rojas

Dr. Gail Smith

Ms. Carolyn Trowbridge

A quorum was established (7)

Non-Board Members:

Dr. Francisco García, Deputy County Administrator, Pima County – Absent

Dr. Bob England, Pima County Health Department Director

Ms. Paula Mandel, Pima County Health Department, Deputy Director - Absent

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Skipped due to this meeting being a teleconference meeting only.

3. MINUTES ADOPTION

- Adopted Board of Health Minutes February 26, 2020.

The motion was made and seconded (Mr. Rojas / Mr. Humphry) that the February 26, 2020, Board of Health Minutes be adopted. Motion carried 7-0.

4. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

- Dr. England updated the Board on COVID-19. The activities include the Incident Command (IC) staff have been working on the pandemic since January 26, 2020. The IC Staff have been working from the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) since March 13, 2020. Currently there are 46 cases in Pima County with one confirmed death. There are many pending cases. Case counts are updated daily in the mornings. Much of the turmoil has been our reaction to the virus. All the mitigation measures that have been put into place will flatten the curve and protect the health care system. Currently hospitals have

capacity. Per the Governor's order, hospitals have stopped elective procedures, increased their ICU bed capacity, and have adequate staff.

Initially, only the CDC labs were doing the testing. Ultimately testing was sent to state labs. However, the amount of tests were limited. Private and University of Arizona labs increased their capacity to test however samples could not be collected due to shortages of swabs, test tubes, and other universal transport media. Additionally, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal tests kits that were ordered were cancelled due to overwhelming demand. Labs did provide some 200 test kits yesterday however the material used to make the swab shaft was wood and could not be used. Regular production of tests should begin next week. The turnaround time for test results is five to eight days due to the labs being backed up which is inadequate from a public health standpoint. The PCR test identifies the virus' genetic material and provides a positive or negative result. No viral loads are performed however there is a threshold.

Drive through testing is being conducted by appointment only. The appointment is made through Banner only after symptoms are present especially shortness of breath. Banner is supplied with enough test kits for drive through testing and Dr. England applauds this method as the process keeps the sick out of the health care facilities and saves personal protective equipment (PPE). Dr. England is concerned with outbreaks at Long Term Care facilities.

Mr. Geoffrion inquired on the mortality rate of the virus. Dr. England shared that the mortality rate among the positive cases can increase because of the amount of people who died and some of the positives are still sick and might die later. On the flip side, due to the limited tests, only the sickest are being tested which makes mortality, hospitalization, and severe illness rates look worse than what it really is because we're not testing the people with milder illness which is the case in Italy, Spain, and most of the world. South Korea has done the most testing per population with a mortality rate of 0.7 per cent. Even there they are not testing asymptomatic people. There is a case study of the cruise ship showing nearly half that tested positive reported no symptoms. This in no way diminishes the severity of the virus.

Dr. England shared that he and Will Humble wrote an opinion piece approximately one month ago that suggested a cautious approach that considered all the costs in question. A recession has a large impact on health. Cancelling schools, closing restaurants, and other mitigations will have an impact on the unemployment rate which can lead to potential of loss of life. As a country, we have taken mitigation steps to flatten the curve which results in increasing the length of the outbreak, lengthens the time of mitigation, and extends the time of herd immunity (goal is 70% range). All of these steps will hopefully provide enough time (6 to 18 months) to produce a vaccine.

Mr. Humphrey inquired when is it appropriate to begin talking about reopening the country because the economy cannot handle a prolonged shutdown. Dr. England stated that the Board of Supervisors requested the Health Department begin submitting recommendations of how to reopen the local economy. For example outside seating at restaurants and reducing tables for social distancing may be a factor when reopening restaurants.

Mr. Geoffrion inquired on what protections should be used while shopping. Dr. England stated the virus is spread through droplets. He encourages not to shop unless necessary. Don't unnecessarily touch items. Keep your distance. Cover mouth and nose with a mask.

PPE is in short supply and reorders are backlogged. The strategic national stockpile is being shipped to Arizona which was not a lot and already moved to within the community. Staff at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) are taking orders of private sector in the healthcare community. The EOC has a database that captures hospital PPE, beds, ventilators, and other supplies. Cancelling out-patient procedures will help save PPE.

The Health Department has a webpage for COVID-19 information which is www.pima.gov/covid-19. Supervisor Elías shared that this site is also available in Spanish and is being utilized by those in Mexico.

Dr. Smith suggested that adopting or fostering a pet will help members of the community of being lonely and may provide a distraction. Supervisor Elías shared that if there is a community need for spay services to contact the Pima Animal Care Center.

Dr. Horwitz inquired if property tax payments are going to be affected. Supervisor Elías shared that this decision comes from state legislature.

- Dr. England shared an update on the Health Department Director position. There are four finalist. The last interview is on March 31, 2020. Dr. Garcia will ultimately decide. Dr. England will make himself available until there is a full transition with the new director.

5. **CALL TO AUDIENCE**

- There were no speakers from the audience.

6. **SUMMATION OF ACTION ITEMS & PROPOSAL OF FUTURE ITEMS**

- Dr. Horwitz reminded the Board to email him with items for the agenda.

7. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 4:38 P.M.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 22, 2020 at 3:00PM