

County Council of Harford County
Board of Health Update
May 12, 2020 – 6:00PM

Call to Order

The Harford County Health Officer Update was called to order by County Council President Vincenti, with all members in attendance. The County Council serves as the Board of Health for the purposes of the session.

Board of Health Update

Dr. Russell Moy, Harford County Health Department (HCHD) Health Officer, provided an update to the Board of Health.

I. General Update

- A. Board members were provided with a handout that reviews two of the health department's accreditation efforts this year – national Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) and Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditations.
- B. Health department buildings have been closed the past 2 months, but efforts have been made to maintain a reasonable level of services by way of telephone, telehealth, and as virtually as possible. HCHD hopes to open its 1 North Main Family Health Center in June in order to offer much needed youth and adolescent mental health, women's health, dental care, WIC, care coordination, and other services in a one-stop shop site on Main Street.
- C. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the health department's critical population health services, including emergency preparedness, outbreak investigation, and environmental health services that do not always get the spotlight in public health.

II. COVID-19 Update

- A. Key points about the virus were reviewed:
 - 1. The disease spreads from person to person, mainly through respiratory droplets.
 - 2. It is an extraordinarily contagious virus.
 - 3. Symptoms include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell.
 - 4. There is no specific medication or vaccine currently yet available.
 - 5. Highest risk groups are older people and those with underlying medical conditions.
 - 6. Preventive measures include washing your hands, covering your cough, avoiding crowds, and social distancing.
 - 7. If you test positive for COVID-19, listen to your healthcare provider, as 80% of people will have mild-moderate symptoms and can recover at home – where they must self-isolate for 10 days and must be fever-free and symptom-free for 3 days.
- B. Key COVID-19 statistics as of today, 5/12/2020 include:
 - 1. Worldwide, there are 4.2 million cases with 287,000 deaths.
 - 2. In the U.S., there are 1.3 million cases with 80,000 deaths.
 - 3. In Maryland, there are 34,000 cases with 1,643 deaths.
 - 4. In Harford County, there are 614 cases with 23 confirmed deaths.

- C. The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths spiked in March and April and has already made COVID-19 the 3rd leading cause of death in the U.S. If the 80,000 COVID-19 U.S. deaths should exceed 270,000 by the end of the calendar year, then COVID-19 would become the number one cause of death in the country.
- D. In Harford County, age-specific data show that:
1. Those between the ages of 18 and 64 make up 66% of COVID-19 cases, but account for only 12% of COVID-19 deaths.
 2. Those age 65 and older make up 33% of COVID-19 cases, but account for 88% of deaths.
 3. Those under age 18 account for only 1% of cases and no deaths.
- E. In Harford County, nursing home-specific data show that:
1. In Maryland, there are 4,323 nursing home COVID-19 cases making up 13% of the State's cases, and 792 COVID-19 deaths making up 48% of the State's deaths.
 2. In Harford County, there are 134 nursing home COVID-19 cases making up 22% of the County's cases, and 12 COVID-19 deaths making up 52% of the County's deaths.
- F. As of May 8th, comparing Harford County with 10 other of the larger Maryland jurisdictions that have at least 500 COVID-19 cases, after adjusting for population size, Harford County has the lowest number of cases per capita. These numbers could change, as we start to test more people for COVID-19.
- G. As of May 8th, comparing Harford County with 10 other of the larger Maryland jurisdictions that have at least 500 COVID-19 cases, after adjusting for population size, Harford County also has the lowest number of deaths per capita.
- H. Over the past several weeks, there has been discussion at both the national and state levels about relaxing social distancing rules.
1. The Governor's Maryland Strong Plan goes over the 4 pillars for recovery, including testing, personal protective equipment (PPE), contact tracing, and hospital surge capacity. In addition, the metrics necessary for recovery include a 14-day downward trend for hospitalizations, ICU bed usage, and COVID-19 deaths.
 2. As Harford County residents think about relaxing restrictions, we would like to review some key considerations: We should not think about the COVID-19 recovery as a light switch that you turn on or off. You need to use your judgment and common sense.
 3. For example, the Governor's May 6th executive order states: "Political subdivisions are not prohibited from opening outdoor public spaces to the general public (such as parks, sports fields and courts, beaches, dog parks, and playgrounds)..." subject to social distancing guidance.
 4. But, CDC guidance still says: "Don't use playgrounds, including water playgrounds, located within local, state, or national parks. Using playgrounds might lead to the spread of COVID-19 because: (1) they are often crowded and could easily exceed recommended guidance for gatherings; (2) it can be challenging to keep surfaces clean and disinfected; (3) the virus can spread when

young children touch contaminated equipment and then touch their hands to their eyes, nose, or mouth.”

5. If you open a playground, you should make sure that social distancing rules are being followed: (1) make sure there are no gatherings larger than 10 people; (2) make sure that people stay 6 feet apart from each other; (3) make sure that surfaces are kept clean and disinfected; (4) make sure that kids don't touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.
6. Here is our recommendation – that we will be posting on our website:
 - a) When it comes to visiting parks and playgrounds – you need to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.
 - b) Staying physically active is a good way to keep healthy, but ONLY if you are able to follow social distancing and other preventive measures when doing so:
 - c) All children should be accompanied by an adult.
 - d) Stay at least 6 feet away from others to maintain “social distancing”.
 - e) Avoid large gatherings of more than 10 people.
 - f) Wash hands or use disinfectant wipes or hand sanitizer (and think about bringing your own with you).
 - g) Stay home if you're sick.
 - h) Consider wearing a face covering.
 - i) Come prepared – consider bringing your own water bottle.
- I. There is a possibility that more businesses and facilities will be reopening in the weeks to come. For assistance, we recommend the toolkit created by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, led by Dr. Tom Inglesby, entitled an “Operational Toolkit for Businesses Considering Reopening or Expanding Operations in COVID-19” found at: <https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/publications/operational-toolkit-for-businesses-considering-reopening-or-expanding-operations-in-covid-19>.
 1. The toolkit helps businesses and facilities conduct a risk assessment, modification assessment, and develop mitigation measures.
 2. Just as importantly, it helps businesses decide what the trigger should be for modifications or possible closure, if things start to backslide.
 3. The plea to Harford County residents is not to backslide, do not think this pandemic is over, use your judgment to do what you can to keep everyone safe.

III. Health of Harford County Residents

- A. According to the national County Health Rankings methodology, Harford County ranks as the 8th healthiest jurisdiction of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions.
- B. Harford County is doing better than the State and country in areas such as infant mortality rate, teen birth rate, and uninsured rate. Harford County is not doing as well in areas such as drug overdose deaths, adult smoking, and sexually transmitted infections.
- C. One very strong area is that our insurance enrollment unit has helped make Harford County's uninsured rate one of the best in the State and the country.
- D. Good news is that Harford County's opioid deaths have decreased more than 21% from 2018 to 2019, the second straight year that it has gone down.
- E. However, mental health issues are still a concern, with Harford County's suicide mortality rate consistently higher than the statewide average.
- F. Harford County's adult smoking rates are generally higher than the State average.

- G. Good news is that Harford County's youth tobacco use has steadily decreased and is now slightly better than the State average. However, as Harford County's youth tobacco use went down, the youth vaping rate has shot up, doubling between 2016 and 2018.
- H. In Harford County, conditions associated with tobacco use, including heart disease, cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) have mortality rates worse than the State average.
- I. Even with diabetes mortality rates better in Harford County than the State, the trend has steadily worsened over the past 4 years and that trend bears watching.
- J. In summary, Harford County has made progress with reducing its opioid overdose deaths. But we still need to address youth vaping and adult smoking, as well as the diseases that are associated with those behaviors. But for now, we need to focus on strengthening our emergency preparedness and outbreak investigation public health infrastructure over the rest of the calendar year – to help us through the COVID-19 pandemic that is our number one priority.

IV. Questions & Comments

- A. Council President Vincenti thanked Dr. Moy and Marcy Austin, deputy health officer, for their hard work during this time along with working with essential businesses to ensure they remain open and operating safely.
- B. Councilman Giangiordano asked about the 14 day downward trajectory and if the hospitalization and ICU bed usage is decreasing. Dr. Moy mentioned that UMUHC has more information on this and that the hospital has done a lot to prepare for this pandemic and has not reached a point where they are having problems with capacity at this time.
- C. Councilman Wagner thanked Dr. Moy and his staff for their work during this time. He inquired about the opioid deaths and wanted to confirm that the downward trend is partially due to naloxone usage. Councilman Wagner queried about other high drug usage aside from opioids. Dr. Moy mentioned that other drug usage that could be on the rise is cocaine, but a great first step is the decrease in opioid usage. Councilman Wagner asked if deaths are inflated during this time and if they are attributed to COVID. Dr. Moy stated that deaths are counted uniformly, that if a person who passed away has a confirmed COVID lab test and has COVID as a cause of death stated on their death certificate, then that is attributed as a COVID death.
- D. Councilman Beulah thanked Dr. Moy and his staff during these trying times. He asked about the data coming from different states and inquired specifically about New York, which showed that a majority of the new cases came from individuals that were staying at home. Dr. Moy mentioned that the literature does say the safest thing you can do is stay home, but if you are home with other individuals in a confined space and if you have someone who is COVID positive in your house then others in the household will likely get infected. Councilman Beulah asked about the house UV systems for furnaces. Dr. Moy has heard of many ways to disinfect COVID but there is no consensus yet about what works the best.

- E. Councilman Woods asked if health inspectors are doing inspections of any type right now. John Resline stated that environmental health land and water resources, well and septic, building permits, etc. are all essentially occurring along with modifications. They are inspecting pools and camps in case they are able to open in the future. For food service facilities and places that are licensed and are serving carry-out and pick-up, health inspectors are contacting owners over the phone to go over supplies, operation, how they are screening employees, and recently discussing in-person facility inspections and how this can be modified. If there is a public health concern someone is able to go out and investigate.
- F. Councilman Woods asked if the health department has a list of cleaning services or contractors that perform sterilization or cleaning and that he has received calls about this. John Resline stated that he has not received phone calls pertaining to this specifically with COVID sanitization and does not have a list. Environmental health does distribute a list from the Maryland Department of Health with approved cleaning disinfectants.
- G. Councilman Woods inquired about the high amount of negative tests. Dr. Moy mentioned that COVID testing criteria has been changing since the beginning along with the number of tests available. As more testing became available, then in certain settings, such as congregate care facilities, the decision was made to test everyone because of the many people living in close quarters. It is important to test to separate positives from negatives and that is why you see a high number of negatives. They are also testing more people, because they now learned that asymptomatic people can carry the virus. Talk around the high amount of negative testing will occur down the line and it will help show the prevalence of COVID.
- H. Council President. Vincenti asked how the health department is continuing to fulfill the needs of people. Marcy Austin stated that the behavioral health unit has moved completely to telehealth and are able to continue one on one and group counseling from home and the Crisis Center is able to complete required urine screenings and Vivitrol shots. Care coordination, MCHP health insurance, MEGAN's Place, etc. has also moved to telework and are able to do home visits by phone and take calls from their home. At the Woodbridge location, the nurses are able to give Depo Provera shots for family planning purposes, as long as patients stay in the car.