



AGENDA
Richland County Board of Health
May 18, 2020
2:30 – 4:00 PM

Meeting via phone call
1-800-747-5150
Access Code: 4336887

1. Call the meeting to order, establish a quorum and introductions – Duane Mitchell

Duane Mitchell called the meeting to order at 2:35 PM

2. Review the Agenda- Duane Mitchell

Terry Meldahl made motion to accept the agenda; Melissa Boyer seconds

3. Health Department Administrator Report

- a. General Health Department Updates – Brittney Petersen*
 - i. Policy Discussion/Department Policies*
 - ii. COVID-19*

Brittney Petersen reported back to the Board on what mass testing is being done in Montana. As of right now, there are three counties carrying out mass testing. Each of these mass testing operations falls under the tier system of the Governor’s sentinel surveillance plan. In Toole and Cascade counties, the mass testing is being carried out by Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), also known as Community Health Centers. Due to the testing being carried out by these community health centers, people will not be turned away due to inability to pay for the test. The other mass testing is being conducted at the Fort Belknap Reservation.

In Cascade County, the testing is being done at a FQHC in Great Falls. They are only testing those who are symptomatic and there is an extensive screening process beforehand that takes a series of telehealth visits and a waiting period. A FQHC in Toole County is testing anyone who wants to be tested. Brittney and other DPHHS officials have emphasized that mass testing is only a snapshot in time.

Surge Planning

Brittney Petersen posed the question of what to do if there is a surge in the county. There was consensus amongst the board, health department, and the Health Officer that this is a topic that requires serious consideration. Jen Doty, CEO of Sidney Health Center, should be included in these discussions to define what constitutes a ‘surge’ and what would be the county’s response—such as closing the county back down. Sheriff Dynneson asked if higher numbers of positive cases are regarded as a surge or just the result of more testing; this was acknowledged as

an important question by board members. Some preliminary ideas amongst the board were rates of hospitalizations, deaths, and the age distribution of cases. It was emphasized that deaths play a critical part, especially for public perception. The question of what actions can be taken at the county level was raised if there was a surge and what it would look like; for example, another health order.

Richland County Communicable Disease Nurse Julie Brodhead brought up how as things begin to open up, contact tracing will become exponentially more difficult as people move around and attend more populated events or activities. Our messaging should include telling people to consider limiting their circle of close contacts and minimizing the amount of time you are in contact with people as much as possible and continuing to abide by the guidance on personal hygiene (e.g. washing hands, cleaning high frequency touch surfaces, and staying home when you are sick). Messaging should also push for individuals to keep a good record of where they have been, so public health can successfully conduct its contact investigations and prevent sustained spread of COVID-19 in Richland County. We want to engage people to be personally responsible to support our efforts to safely reopen as a county.

4. **Health Officer Report** – *Jacquelyn Free, FNP*

No update other than mentioning that a big consideration in surge planning is the amount of staff that would be displaced at the hospital to deal with a surge of COVID-19 cases. During the discourse on surge planning, the concept of herd immunity as criteria for reopening was discussed by board members. Jacq informed the board that according to Johns Hopkins University, 70-90% of the population must be immune to satisfy the criteria of herd immunity. Jacq added that this is why public health pushes for vaccines.

5. **County Attorney Report** – *Janet Christoffersen*

Janet Christoffersen began her report by saying the health department has done a great job so far. She went on to say that Richland County is on track with every other county in Montana with where we are right now, and that most counties are under a health order. Richland County's health order has expired and Janet stated that should there be a surge, the old health order can be renewed; she will begin looking into that process. At the request of Commissioner Gorder, Janet will also look at what counties in Montana are not under a health order and what actions their health boards have taken in response to COVID-19.

6. **Old business** –*Duane Mitchell*

Rodeos and Concessions

At the state junior high rodeo to be held on the county fairgrounds, there will be no spectators or concessions as a way to decrease congregation. However, food trucks may set up outside the grounds, not in the vicinity of the arena so as to not be construed as concessions. The local food trucks will be considered a concurrent event to the rodeo and will be provided guidance that they are required to follow.

Richland Park Camping

Sheriff Dynneson reports that there are still people coming in to get separate permits for what appears to be a large camping event. We are following guidelines sent out by Fish and Wildlife that prohibit overnight camping at community parks. Permits are allowed only for activities during daytime hours. There is consensus amongst the Board and Sheriff that the no overnight camping will be permitted to occur at Richland Park. RV parks in the county are still open and do not operate under Fish and Wildlife guidelines.

7. New Business – Duane Mitchell

Lambert 4th of July parade, Old Timers in Fairview, and the All-School Reunion are still being planned and proper guidelines are being looked at. Kathy Helmuth of RCHD will find out who organizes the Lambert 4th of July celebration and inform Commissioner Mitchell.

All elected official offices will be opening back up and an email will be sent out today at 4:30 PM. There was emphasis by Commissioner Mitchell that all offices must open concurrently. County treasurer Sandy Christensen has opened her office and has implemented good social distancing methods. The county commissioner's doors were never closed to the public. Janet reported that she opened her office per the resolution.

8. Public Comment –

Jen Doty, Sidney Health Center – CEO

Update on COVID-19 Testing:

To date, Sidney Health Center (SHC) has done 175-180 tests for symptomatic patients. Beginning the week of May 25th, they will test the residents and staff of the Extended Care and The Lodge as part of the state's sentinel surveillance push—which is about 150-200 tests. SHC will start testing asymptomatic people in the emergency department (ED) using test kits and PPE provided by the state. These surveillance tests in the ED will be processed at no cost to the patient. The number of tests provided to each hospital is based on rate of ED visits. All of this surveillance testing falls under the Governor's plan to get to 60,000 tests per month in the state. Otherwise, SHC at this time does not have enough test kits to offer asymptomatic testing to the general public, but they are confident they can cover testing for all symptomatic patients.

SHC is screening all surgical patients for COVID-19 using diagnostic tests that are sent to the state public health lab and its reference labs. SHC is currently at 30% surgical capacity. The lab is working on getting an in-house, rapid PCR test method up and running for surgical patients using the Cepheid platform. FEMA has been buying up vast numbers of the Cepheid test kits, so SHC has had limited success in acquiring these kits without significant financial cost. The goal of the rapid test is to be able to test surgical patients the day of their surgery, which will continue to be the case until a vaccine is widely available. Currently, pre-op patients who are tested days out from their surgery have to stay in home-quarantine until their test results come back. Since testing for pre-op patients has a lower processing priority at the state lab and a patient could be exposed to and contract COVID-19 in the long window leading up to the surgery, there is significant need for the rapid test to be operational. Deb Gilbert from county DES will reach out

to her people up the ladder to inquire about ordering these Cepheid test kits for SHC per board members request.

Currently, SHC is validating the antibody test and they are planning to use it to screen staff shortly. To validate the testing system, they used blood samples from the three confirmed positive Richland County cases as well as a handful of people who tested negative for COVID-19.

There was discussion amongst board members about the efficacy of the shutdown, with emphasis that it is hard to know what the prevalence of COVID-19 would look like had there not been a massive prolonged shutdown. Commissioner Mitchell raised concerns about potential inconsistencies in the statistical reporting of epidemiological data across the country. Jen Doty highlighted that the main reason for 60,000 tests a month is early detection to prevent spread of the disease and prevent another shutdown. She also said that it is good news that Montana's numbers are so low, meaning the shutdown prevented a larger crisis.

The board requested Jen Doty give regular Sidney Health Center updates at these special Monday Board of Health meetings. She agreed to do so.

Mayor Bieber – Fairview, MT

The committee organizing the Old Timer's festival has agreed to wait it out for a month. Mayor Bieber also mentioned the challenge of the 14 day quarantine directive and how/when it is enforced. The issue of liability was also raised since it is scaring many people. Since the county is under MACO guidelines, if there is an event in a county-owned building, the event host must sign off that they will comply with social distancing guidelines before the event takes place. Therefore, the liability is off the county and on the event host/renter. PIO Stephanie Ler and Jamie Larson at the county fairgrounds have worked together to develop these guidelines for events. Mayor Norby of Sidney confirmed that the League of City guidelines largely line up with MACO's.

Mayor Norby – Sidney, MT

Mayor Norby brought up that planning for the annual Memorial Day parade has included input from Stephanie Ler at the health department.

Jamie Larson – Richland County Fairgrounds

Jamie reports that the Stephanie Ler and the Richland County Health Department have been incredibly helpful with assisting with event planning at the county fairground.

Debra Gilbert – Richland County DES

The two 330 gallon totes of liquid hand sanitizer have arrived. One tote has been given to Sidney Health Center and other is for the county. The county's tote has been pumped into 65 five gallon buckets and each bucket is free to whoever needs it. Suggested destinations are as follows: county offices and fairgrounds, Savage Manor, Crestwood Inn, VFW, the Old Timers event committee and the schools. Deb Gilbert will reach out to Sidney and Fairview schools to offer sanitizer for their graduations. Whoever receives the bucket will be responsible for getting a pump and providing their own smaller containers.

Meeting adjourned; next meeting date June 1, 2020.