

**Board of Health
Tuesday, December 5, 2023
Virtual Meeting**

Members Attending: B. Hospidor, K. Schorn, J. Dethoff, K. Wang, J. Henning

Others Attending: S. Smith, C. Reed, M. Sninsky, J. Melendez

Dr. Dethoff called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm. He stated that a quorum is present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Hospidor, seconded by Ms. Schorn, to approve the October 3, 2023 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

REPORTS

- EMS

Dr. Dethoff stated that the Board now regularly gets reports from EMS including their use of Narcan. He questioned if EMS uses Narcan more often during certain seasons. Deputy Chief Sninsky stated that use is higher during the spring, summer, and fall months. He stated that EMS uses Narcan approximately 30 – 40 times per month. He stated that other responding services may also use Narcan on Reading residents but that there is no information available.

Dr. Dethoff questioned what other responding services there are. Deputy Chief Sninsky explained that Reading has reciprocal agreements with other ambulance services so that they cover Reading when Reading is not available and Reading covers for them when they are not available. He stated that the number of times Reading covers for others and others cover for Reading are approximately equal.

Deputy Chief Sninsky reported that COVID cases in the Fire Department have become infrequent. He expressed the belief that seasonal issues such as bronchitis, pneumonia, flu, etc. are presenting earlier than in the past.

Deputy Chief Sninsky noted an increase in responses for mental health issues. He stated that a Department goal in 2024 is to begin use of Droperidol (regularly used for post op nausea) as a mild sedative for those who need it in crisis situations. He stated that the Department will be undergoing training on how to administer Droperidol and to better handle those in crisis.

- Health Inspection

Mr. Reed stated that 53 inspections have been completed since the Board's last meeting. He stated that the focus remains on inspecting businesses that have changed ownership. He stated that there is still a large amount of turnover and noted the need for the City's records to be correct.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if the large turnover could be caused by these establishments being opened for money laundering or other illegal operations. Mr. Reed expressed the belief that many bodegas change food stamp funds into cash for 50 cents on the dollar. He stated that the SNAP card is swiped and cash is given to the customer. He expressed the belief that this is big business.

- Lead Abatement Program

Mr. Melendez introduced himself to the Board and stated that to date 16 units have been remediated for lead and 14 are currently in process.

Dr. Dethoff stated that it was reported in the past that there weren't enough certified contractors to perform this work. He questioned if that was still the case. Mr. Melendez stated that the City has now contracted with a list of certified businesses. He noted the need for additional referrals.

Ms. Smith suggested that Mr. Melendez give a brief background for new members.

Mr. Melendez stated that the City received a grant for \$3.5 million from HUD to remediate 150 homes by February 2025. He stated that the contractor will test the entire home and soil for lead sources and perform a complete remediation at no cost to the property owner or the tenant.

Dr. Dethoff questioned how the City receives referrals. Mr. Melendez stated that many times referrals are through the Berks Community Health Center after pediatric blood tests. He stated that he also attends events to promote the program.

Dr. Dethoff stated that he recently read that a new source of lead contamination is old, buried telephone wires. He questioned how that could be problematic. Mr. Melendez suggested that perhaps the wires are leeching lead into the soil due to rainwater.

Dr. Wang questioned if there have been any issues with property owners not wanting to move forward with remediation. Mr. Melendez stated that many landlords are pleased that the City will perform this work, especially since it is at no cost to them. He stated that they have all been cooperative.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if an entire block would be remediated if a cluster of elevated lead levels is discovered. Mr. Melendez stated that in some municipalities, lead testing is performed at rental units and rental permits are not issued if there are elevated lead levels. He noted his hope that Reading would move in that direction in the future.

- Health Literacy Program

Dr. Dethoff stated that there will be an update on this topic at the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- RSV and Pneumococcal Vaccines

Dr. Dethoff questioned who should receive the RSV vaccine. Dr. Wang stated that people can get any respiratory illness multiple times, even within the same season. She stated that the RSV vaccine is recommended for those over a certain age because of waning immunity. She stated that it is worth discussing with your doctor to reduce your chances of becoming hospitalized. She stated that it is

currently unknown if this vaccine will need to be repeated. She stated that the vaccine is recommended by the CDC and she concurs. She suggested that anyone who is high risk should get the vaccine.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if those who had their pneumococcal vaccine should get the newer, more effective version. Dr. Wang stated that the new vaccine will replace the older version. She stated that she is unsure about this since she focuses on pediatric care. She suggested that all discuss this with their doctors as well.

- 2024 Meeting Schedule

The Board agreed to keep the meeting schedule the same in 2024 – the first Tuesday of February, April, June, August, October, and December at 4 pm via Zoom.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Henning stated that he was interested to see that the City's 2024 budget includes funding for two social workers in the Police Department. He requested additional details and whether or not this work would be under the purview of this Board. He stated that the social workers will respond to emergency crises. He stated that there are several similar pilot programs nationally.

Ms. Smith stated that she will provide information if she is able and will request a representative from the Police Department to attend the next meeting to discuss this new initiative with the Board.

Mr. Henning stated that the social workers may also overlap with EMS and the use of Narcan.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 6, 2024 at 4 pm via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 4:27 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk