

Mar 09 2022 3:58 pm

Office of the

Board of Health

City Hall
718 Main Street
Fitchburg, Massachusetts 01420
978-829-1870

This was a regular meeting of the Board of Health of the City of Fitchburg held in the Legislative Building at 700 Main Street and recorded by FATV Studios, Fitchburg, on February 3, 2022. The meeting was called to order by Dr. Bogdasarian.

Present: Stephen Curry, Director; Dr. John Bogdasarian, Chair; Sandra Knipe, Jacquelyn Wehtje, Petitioner; Sean-Michael Tantarawat, Food & Milk Inspector; Catherine Hoover, Contact Tracer Supervisor; Victoria Selser, Epidemiologist; Bernie Schultz, City Councilor.

Approve Meeting Minutes:

Ms. Knipe stated on page 2 of the minutes under the request for variance for Applewild School there's a statement that Dr. B recused himself from the hearing, it was a "petition, not a hearing.

Ms. Knipe made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Motion was 2nd by Dr. Bogdasarian. All were in favor, motion carries.

Staffing Update:

Mr. Curry introduced Ms. Victoria Selser, Epidemiologist & Ms. Catherine Hoover, Contact Tracing Supervisor from the Public Health COVID response team. Ms. Selser will present an update on COVID-19.

Victoria Selser stated she is the Epidemiologist for the Montachusett Public Health Network COVID-19 response team. There are currently 429 active cases of COVID-19 in the City of Fitchburg for the time period January 9, 2022 to January 22, 2022 which is the most recent reporting data from the Massachusetts Department of Public health. The data is reported every Thursday by 5:00 PM this data is effective as of last Thursday a week ago today. The positivity rate for this reporting period in the City of Fitchburg was 22.03% which is compared to a 15.33% statewide positivity rate for this same time period and a 26.91% positivity rate in the City of Fitchburg from the previous reporting period which was January 2, 2022 to January 15, 2022. During this two week time period which again was January 9th to January 22nd there were 1,390 cases of COVID-19 in the city of Fitchburg. This number 1390 only reflects the

residents who tested positive with a test at a lab and does not reflect residents who only tested with an at home rapid antigen test and did not get confirmatory testing.

Ms. Selser stated the positivity rate is on the decline and that is representing in a lot of different data pieces including wastewater data across the state of Massachusetts but even though cases are on the decline it's still very important to remain vigilant about masking and indoor spaces and testing when you're exposed and when you have symptoms and staying up to date on your vaccines.

Ms. Selser stated in regards to vaccinations as of January 27, 2022 which is the most recent data reported by the Department of Public health 60% of residents in the City of Fitchburg were fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated defined as receiving one dose of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine or two doses of Pfizer or Moderna. The 60% does not represent anyone that is boosted. This percentage of 60% is about 18% lower than the statewide average. We're continuing to work hard to think of creative ways to bring vaccines into the community directly to our residents in the City of Fitchburg and increase the number of residents vaccinated to get closer to that statewide average.

As of January 27, 2022, 25% of residents in the City of Fitchburg have received their booster. This is a little bit lower than we would hope for, so I just want to remind everyone to get your booster as soon as you're eligible

MPHN COVID response team wants to make sure that everyone is ordering their free at home tests from covidtests.gov. Everyone is eligible for four free at home COVID tests that will be shipped directly to your home and can be ordered from this website. If any resident needs assistance with ordering these at home tests they can give us a call at 978-602-2356.

Dr. Bogdasarian asked what the statewide fully vaccinated rate is. Ms. Selser stated the fully vaccinated rate is just above 78%. The percentage in the City of Fitchburg fully vaccinated is 60% and for boosters we are at 25%.

The Massachusetts Public Health Network COVID-19 response team as we all know the state contact tracing program transitioned the contact tracing responsibilities back to the local health department effective as of December 1, 2021. Following this closure of the state contact tracing program this MPH Covid-19 response team was established to provide COVID support for the entire Montachusett Public Health Network region which includes 13 communities and about 175,000 residents. The hours are Monday through Saturday 10:00 to 5:30 PM and we have staff that speak both English and Spanish so we are able to serve all of our residents who need assistance. The phone number is 978 602-2356.

Ms. Selser stated since January 3, 2022 the MPHN team which was the first day of making phone calls for the MPHN region and the team has called about 1500 residents from the 13 communities who have tested positive for COVID-19. Also, due to the current surge of cases across the state of Massachusetts we are prioritizing calling individuals who are at the highest

risk of adverse outcomes due to COVID-19 which would include residents who are over the age of 65 and residents who haven't received COVID-19 vaccination. When someone receives a call from the local Board of Health they are told they are positive and then their contacts are collected and notified and that is the end, however on these calls we are providing a comprehensive support for our residents that are positive or who have been exposed. We also are providing isolation and quarantine instructions for themselves and their close contacts. This is something that has been really appreciated by our residents. They are also getting information about vaccination when applicable whether it be if they need their first dose second dose or booster.

MPHN team also offers coordination of resource referrals especially in Fitchburg and Leominster and also some other communities in our region. Our residents are needing a lot of support to safely isolate and quarantine and we're able to coordinate these resource referrals which would include anything such as food, financial assistance access to health care such as health insurance and a primary care doctor. These are things that a lot of our residents need help with and it's something that will make an impact even beyond their isolation.

Ms. Selser stated they are also helping residents schedule appointments for vaccination if they don't have access to a computer or if they have trouble navigating the Internet.

We are also working on coordinating comprehensive outbreak response to COVID-19 outbreaks that occur in our highest risk populations most commonly we've only been at this for a month so we've only done two site visits so far but both of them have been in senior housing apartment buildings. The first one that we were able to schedule an onsite clinic in the community room and we vaccinated 9 residents out of a 31 unit building one first dose and eight boosters.

The staff of the MPHN includes an Epidemiologist, a Contact Investigator Supervisor and eight Contact Investigators. All staff work remotely from home.

Food & Milk Inspector Appointment: Sean-Michael Tantinarawat

Mr. Curry introduced Sean-Michael Tantinarawat he started on January 3rd and he has done some training in some towns he's also spent some time with a few food consultants but he's done a wonderful job thus far and he's very receptive to information. He also has a lot of kitchen experience with his previous employment. He is working on food permitting systems and he's reaching out to those folks that have any questions about their food licenses and facilities.

Ms. Knipe made a motion for the official appointment for Sean-Michael Tantinarawat for the Food & Milk Inspector for the City of Fitchburg Board of Health. Motion was 2nd by Dr. Bogdasarian. All were in favor, motion carries.

Annual Chair Appointment/vote: Table until the next meeting.

Clinics:

Mr. Curry stated clinics are offered every Friday (12-6) & Saturday clinics from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM until February 18, 2022 located at the Legislative Building at 700 Main St. There is a link on the website to sign up and make an appointment but we are also accepting walk-ins. Further information to come on expanding the clinic dates.

The test site is located at the Fitchburg Airport and runs Monday thru Thursdays 12 to 4. Testing is (PCR).

Request for Variances:

Newpro Homes – 117 Constitution Drive. 248 CRM 10.10 (7) (c)

- 4. (Plumbing Code) to replace an existing tub with a walk-in shower. Due to the location of the plumbing at this property conversion to a 2” drain is not possible. The installation will be utilizing a 4” threshold pan and no more than 2.5 GPM shower head in compliance with the variance guidelines.

Newpro Homes were not able to make it this evening. Mr. Curry stated this is a request for variances by Newpro Homes at 117 Constitution Drive. This was a request to reduce the plumbing in a condominium at 117 Constitution Dr. The Board of Health still has to grant variances as well as the Mass. Plumbing Board. This homeowner wants to replace his existing tub with a walk in shower and they are unable to put the proper size drain in so they will be installing a 4” thresh threshold pan and also installing a restrictive showerhead at 2.5 gallons per minute to help with the variance. Mr. Curry did speak to the Plumbing Inspector as well as the Building Commissioner and neither of those individuals have any concerns over this.

Dr. Bogdasarian made a motion to grant the requested variance to change the existing tub for a walk in shower. Ms. Knipe, 2nd the motion with a condition that the BOH receives a report from the Plumbing Inspector after inspection. All were in favor, motion carries.

Petitions:

Jacquelyn Wehtje – Petitioning to rescind the entire BOH Mask Mandate adopted August 5,

Ms. Wehtje stated at previous meetings Mr. Murray had presented a reference to studies which he says justify mask mandates and one of them was from Johns Hopkins University. Yesterday they released a study which showed that the lockdowns done in the United States and Europe in which people had their businesses shut down, lost their jobs, and children were not allowed to attend school, didn't work and had no measurable impact on COVID-19

mortality rates. I hope that would give you a little pause and make you realize that you can't regulate your way out of a public health emergency. His studies also predated the Omicron variant which is extremely contagious and has even escaped quarantines. It is so contagious that according to numerous public health officials such as Dr. Fauci, Dr. Woodcock and Dr. Jean. Everybody is going to get it. Trying to stop Omicron with masks will not work. Vaccines and not masks are the solution.

See Exhibit A

See Exhibit B

Additionally your mask mandate is unjust because it's being applied unevenly. The people who lead the city should be setting the example and they're not following the mandate themselves. Two city employees the Mayor and one other not 6 feet apart but standing shoulder to shoulder not wearing masks. See Exhibit C.

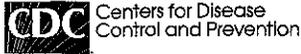
The Declaration of Independence says we're all created equal if you're not going to enforce your mandate equally it's unjust everyone should have a right to control their bodies including their face it's not just the people in the city who are politically powerful such as the Mayor. I understand there are many people who are nervous and still concerned about Covid.

The last thing I've included is an article from three prominent Massachusetts doctors one from Tufts University School of Medicine one from Harvard Medical School and one from the BU School of Medicine. **Exhibit D.** They're proposing what's known as one way masking. As you know this week already the free and 95 masks sent out by the Biden administration are reaching the shelves in local stores anyone can go and get five free N95 masks. If you're worried about COVID you can put on an N95 mask as it's the same type of mask that medical providers in COVID wards where when they're around COVID patients all day long that can keep you safe. You can get your vaccine, you can get your booster you can get your free N95 mask. If you're worried about COVID take that level of personal responsibility for your health rather than imposing a mandate on everyone else which is unjust and unevenly enforced.

Dr. Bogdasarian stated it is becoming evident the rate of COVID infection seems to be going down. On the other hand I think the Massachusetts Department of Education is still requiring masks in the school up until the end of February and then they will reassess. I think that is supported by parents and teachers. Fitchburg State University is allowed to eliminate mask use because they've achieved 100% vaccination rate more than 80% but they have asked to continue it as well as the Library.

After lengthy discussion Dr. Bogdasarian made a motion to continue the mask mandate currently in place and we will reassess at the end of this month. If the Department of Education says we don't need masks and enough people are vaccinated then we will consider dropping the mask mandate but until that happens we continue with masks. Motion was 2nd by Ms. Knipe. All were in favor, motion carries.
Meeting adjourned.

Exhibit A



COVID Data Tracker

United States at a Glance

Collapse —

United States
At a Glance

Cases Total **74,037,216**

Last 30 Days

Deaths Total **879,971**

Last 30 Days

80.0% of People 5+ with At Least

One Vaccination

Community High
Transmission

Data Tracker Home

COVID Data Tracker Weekly
Review

Your Community +

Health Equity Data

Pediatric Data

Pregnancy Data

Vaccination Delivery and
Coverage +

Vaccine Effectiveness and
Breakthrough Surveillance +

Cases, Deaths, and Testing +

Demographic Trends +

Health Care Settings +

Variants and Genomic
Surveillance +

Nationwide COVID-19 Infection- and Vaccinati Antibody Seroprevalence (Blood donations)

The nationwide blood donor seroprevalence survey estimates the percentage of the U.S. population have developed antibodies against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, from vaccination or i is known as seroprevalence. [Detailed methods and limitations of the survey have been published.](#)

[View Footnotes and Additional Information](#)

Hover your mouse over circular information icons for important additional informat interpret these data.

Exhibit B

CDC COVID Data Tracker | covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#nationwide-blood-donor-seroprevalence

November 2021 studywide (all regions) combined infection-induced seroprevalence estimates

Seroprevalence Estimate:	93.9%
95% Confidence Interval:	93.8 - 94.1
Persons ≥ 16 years with ≥ 1 COVID-19 vaccine dose (%):	67.6%
Cumulative reported COVID-19 cases per 100 population (a):	13.8
Specimens tested (n):	135,135
Counties in study region:	

COVID-19 Seroprevalence: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

Combined seroprevalence estimates over time for all regions

Midwest | Northeast | South | West

8:35 AM 11/21/2022



Home



My Network



Jobs



Natalia Oliver

Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office at City of Fitchburg MA

[View full profile](#)



Natalia Oliver • 3rd+

Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office at City of Fitchburg MA

1w •



Today Mayor Stephen DiNatale - Mayor of Fitchburg was sworn in for his fourth term. Congratulations.

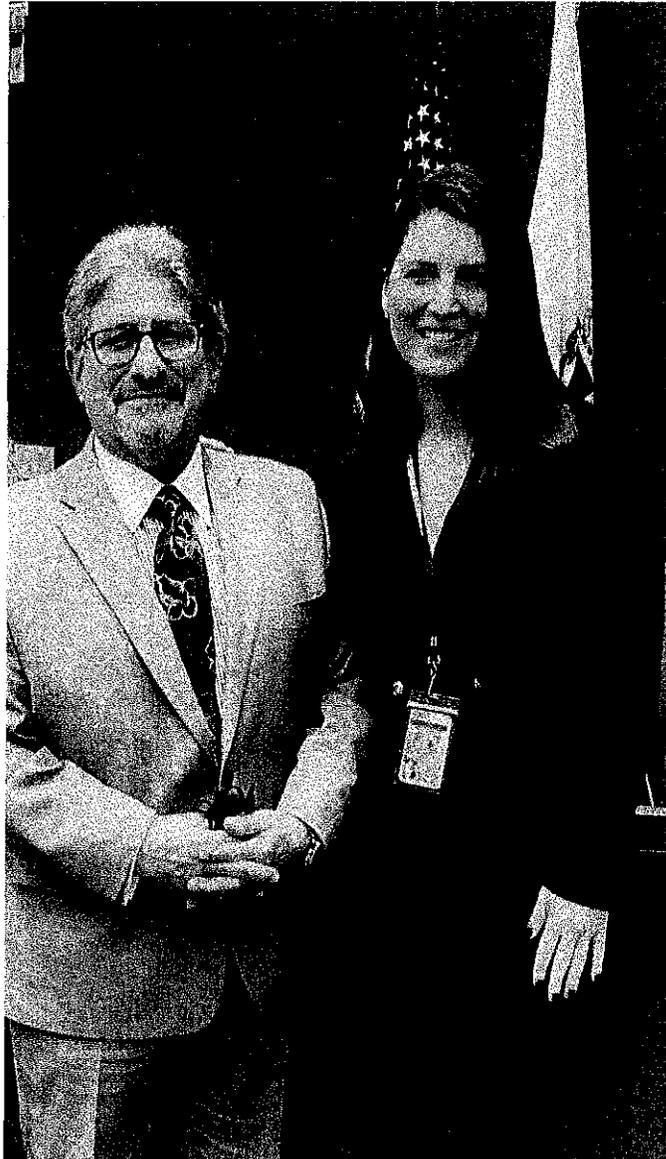


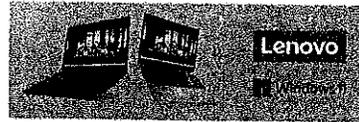
Exhibit D



Life's better together

Powered to connect with everyone this season.

Shop now



Lenovo

AdChoices

BOSTON.COM

'It's time for us to give them their childhood back': Boston-area doctors call for an end to mandatory masking in schools

Marta Hill · 1h ago

React

9

© Suzanne Kreiter/The Boston Globe...

It's time for mandatory masks in schools to go, three Boston-area doctors argued in a *Washington Post* op-ed last week.

Shira Doron, a hospital epidemiologist at Tufts Medical Center and associate professor at Tufts University School of Medicine; Westyn Branch-Elliman, an infectious diseases physician and associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School; and Elissa Perkins, an associate professor of emergency medicine at Boston University School of Medicine and the director of emergency medicine infectious disease management at Boston Medical Center, said schools can now safely make masks optional.

Microsoft Start



Search the web

Heavy Cotton T-Shirt Gildan Turf Green

Ad BulkApparel.com

"Respirators and other high-quality masks are highly effective at protecting their wearers, regardless of what people around them are doing," they wrote. "That makes the old mantra 'my mask protects you and your mask protects me' obsolete."

The trio clarified that in the fall of 2020 they were strongly supportive of universal masking policies but said the policies have come with a cost.

In schools where mask guidelines were rigorously followed, they pointed out that children have not seen their peers or teachers' faces since early 2020. Especially for the youngest learners, the doctors said this affects learning and development. Strict mask rules and other mitigation policies also send a message to children, families, and staff that schools are not safe.

"This is simply not true," the doctors said.

Negative news about COVID-19 and schools and "harsh" restrictions in many districts tell students they are disease vectors, while not recognizing that they are growing children who need social interaction, the physicians wrote.

"There is a youth mental health crisis in this country, yet punitive actions that limit social interaction and normal life continue," they wrote in the op-ed. "School should be a place where children feel safe and supported, even if their mask-wearing isn't perfect."

The CDC's update and the Biden administration's promise to deliver 400 million respirators to the public for free are reasons schools should go mask optional, according to Doron, Branch-Elliman, and Perkins.

Feedback

"Our children have sacrificed a lot to protect us," the doctors wrote. "Now it's time for us to give them their childhood back."

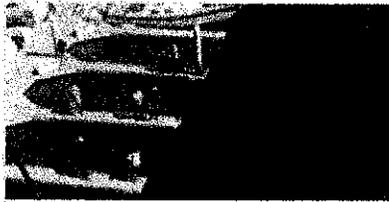
Newsletter Signup

Stay up to date on all the latest news from Boston.com

Submit your email Enter your email address Sign up

The post 'It's time for us to give them their childhood back': Boston-area doctors call for an end to mandatory masking in schools appeared first on Boston.com.

Topics for you



Drones Captures Photos No One Was Supposed to See

Ad Travel: Dreams

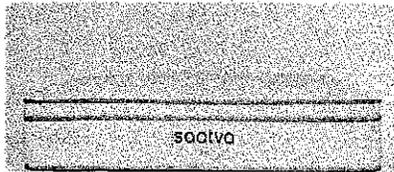


Not So Clean Scott: The End Of 'Property Brothers'

Ad Travel: Dreams



MORE FOR YOU



saotva

Full - Plush Soft Mattress - 11.5 Inch Hybrid Innerspring - Bundled W/...

Ad The Saotva Company



Lake Nona, FL Homes - View All Homes For Sale

Ad myariandorequiers.com

Exclusive Financing - Find Your Used Motorhome Now

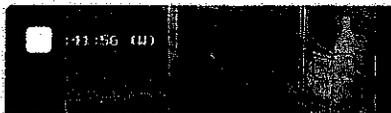


Ad campingworld.com



WFXT Boston

DA: Boston Police Officer died after being found outside Canton home during winter storm



FOX News

Warning, graphic content: NYC man caught on camera attacking child inside restaurant

90 10



Newsweek

Trump Flips on Pardoning Capitol Rioters With 2024 in His Crosshairs

88



Wonderwall

How 72-year-old wide star fell for 66-year-old actress, plus more cele

5k 153

Feedback