

**CITY OF NORWALK
NORWALK BOARD OF HEALTH
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 25, 2025**

ATTENDANCE: Frank Ehrlich, MD, Joan McNeil, DNP, Anthony Santella, DrPH, Norman Weinberger, MD, Janet Karpiak, MD, Ken Lalime, RPh (8:03 a.m.)

STAFF: Deanna D'Amore, Director of Health, Megan Faugno, Special Projects Manager, David Reed, Medical Director, Kelley Tomlinson, Health Educator, Brian Weeks, Program Director of Epidemiology and Informatics, Omar Perez Rivera, Community Health Worker, Theresa Argondezzi, Assistant Director of Health, Community Health

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. D'Amore called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no one from the public who wished to comment at this time.

Mr. Lalime joined the meeting at 8:03 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

• January 28, 2025

**** MS. MCNEIL MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 28, 2025 REGULAR MEETING.**

**** MR. SANTELLA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 28, 2025 REGULAR MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

EPIDEMIOLOGY UPDATES

Mr. Weeks greeted the Board members. He then gave a brief overview of the national status for COVID, RSV and the flu, along with the statistics for Connecticut. The flu levels are high across the nation along with the overall respiratory illnesses. Per the CDC Wastewater Data, Connecticut is experiencing a very high number of flu cases. He reviewed the precaution protocols, such as staying home to prevent the spread of these illnesses.

The CDC has reported an outbreak of measles and noted that many of the individuals contracting the disease are not vaccinated. Some of these cases have required hospitalization due to

complications. The CDC is monitoring and providing a weekly report regarding these cases. Currently, there have been 93 cases reported.

Dr. Weinberger asked if there were any interruptions with the data from the CDC. Mr. Weeks said that there had been some disruption to the data and the CDC has changed the information updates for measles from monthly to weekly.

Ms. McNeil asked if the State Health Department had updated their information. Mr. Weeks said that he did not see any disruption there. Most of the disruption has been on the Federal level.

RAPID COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Ms. Faugno and Mr. Perez Rivera then presented a PowerPoint slide presentation about the Rapid Community Assessment efforts and outlined how the Department has developed the project. Key points are collecting community insights on health concerns. She thanked the staff for their work in gathering the information.

Ms. Faugno then gave a brief overview of how they have been communicating with the public on this issue. She noted that often transportation was an issue for residents getting to appointments, so they have been working on mobile clinics. The community health division worked with the Norwalk Food Pantry, Filling in the Blanks, to offer a mobile clinic at its location. In partnership with Walgreens Pharmacy, eligible recipients received free flu shots during their time at the food provider's location. Many residents indicated that their pediatricians were their most trusted source of information.

Ms. Faugno spoke about the presentation at the Connecticut Public Health Association Conference.

Mr. Perez Rivera came forward to give an overview of data collection methods, which included intercept interviews, an online survey, and listening sessions about childhood vaccines. He also narrated the vaccine survey results. 75% of the respondents stated that it was very important to receive routine childhood vaccines, while 60.9% believe these vaccines are very safe. Both figures indicate that there is some vaccine hesitancy. According to the responses, many families support the recommended vaccination schedule and express trust in their healthcare providers and local public health officials. Limited appointment availability and language barriers are some of the barriers that have been identified. Respondents expressed wanting more information from clinicians regarding the significance of the recommended vaccination schedules.

He also presented a number of recommendations that address different approaches for greater vaccination access and eliminating barriers.

Mr. Santella had several questions about the vaccine rates. Mr. Weeks explained that the data came from the State. Mr. Santella said that the vaccine rates should be 100% for the schools. Dr. Reed said that the number of vaccinated children in CT has been quite high and pointed out that the religious exemption has been cut back significantly. He said that the recommended solutions look very reasonable.

Ms. Faugno said that the Norwalk region has the highest vaccination rate in the State and the staff has worked to get the children vaccinated by age 2.

Ms. Mc Neil asked if this report had been made public. Ms. Faugno said that it was available on the website.

Ms. McNeil said that she had been surprised at the number of churches that was only 30%. Ms. Faugno said that they would be working with the community health workers to get back into the churches.

Dr. Ehrlich said that it would be important to combat misinformation and address the negativity by communicating to those who are concerned. He felt that the data needs to be presented to the public in language they can understand by identifying where the negativity is occurring or why it is occurring. He also expressed concerns about changes at the federal level and its potential impact on addressing vaccine misinformation and hesitancy.

Ms. D'Amore said that the Department would continue to build on the data that they have. It will be important to identify what is the best way to communicate to those who are skeptical and what are the best practices. The Department will continue to look at the resources to do this.

Dr. Ehrlich said that he had been taught to present lectures at the lowest level of the attendees so they will understand.

HEART HEALTH MONTH

Ms. Tomlinson greeted the Board Members and said that during February, the Department focuses on the heart health initiatives. The month begins with the Wear Red Day on the first Friday of the month. They encourage those in the public to wear red to encourage conversations about heart health. The other heart health initiative includes the Know Your Numbers Program. The program offers free health screenings which aim to help residents understand their health status so they can take preventative action. This year, the Know Your Numbers Program was offered at the public library. In partnership with LifeTime Learnings, a Cardiologist was available to speak about heart health education during this event. In addition, the program was offered to employees at City Hall, and other public buildings in Norwalk. In collaboration with the Community Resource Hub, information on basic needs, such as housing, is available to

participants in need. There is some follow up calls made and referral to services for the elevated numbers. Discussion followed about the number of participants that were unaware that one of their levels was elevated.

Ms. Tomlinson gave an overview of the Blood Pressure Self-Monitoring Stations at Elder House, Person to Person and the Library. These stations have literature, other handouts and resources. There is also a blood pressure lending kit program at both libraries. The staff have been trained on how to recalibrate the equipment when it is returned to protect privacy.

The Clinical team will be offering free HIV Testing and other resources like AHA Life Essential 8, the NorWALKer Maps, and the Norwalk Food Alliance. She said that they were happy to offer all these programs all year long.

REPORTS

A. Director's Report

Ms. D'Amore thanked Dr. Reed for all his years of service and noted that they were very close to posting the Medical Director position.

The recommended budget has been posted. She said that the request for the full-time Public Health Nurse position had been included in the recommended City Operating budget for the new fiscal year. This position is currently grant funded, and she expressed her gratitude for this recommendation, as the end of the grant funding period is approaching. The position is essential for providing childhood immunization and other health services to families in Norwalk. The Department also requested that the part-time Relocation Evictions Coordinator position be transitioned to full-time. The full-time position will also involve providing support on enforcement issues, including the increase in lead cases. That full-time position is not included within the Recommended Operating Budget.

The Department will be present to the BET next month on the requested operating budget.

Mr. Santella asked about the pausing of the grant funding. Ms. D'Amore said that they were working with the State Health Department and the Mayor's Office on these issues.

Ms. D'Amore noted that Dr. Karpiak and Ms. Argondezzi both had been present during the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. D'Amore adjourned the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Norwalk
Norwalk Board of Health
Regular Meeting
February 25, 2025