

**KITSAP PUBLIC HEALTH BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES  
Regular Meeting  
October 3, 2023**

The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Mayor Becky Erickson at 10:30 a.m.

Chair Erickson, Mayor of the City of Poulsbo, introduced herself and asked each Board member to introduce themselves. Mayor Rob Putaansuu with the City of Port Orchard, Member Dr. Tara Kirk Sell, Commissioner Christine Rolfes with the Kitsap County Board of Commissioners, Member Dr. Michael Watson, Member Stephen Kutz of the Suquamish Tribe, Member Jolene Sullivan of the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, and Councilperson Hytopoulos with the City of Bainbridge Island each provided a brief introduction. Mayor Greg Wheeler with the City of Bremerton had to step away for a brief period of time, so he was not present to provide an introduction.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Member Jackson moved and Dr. Watson seconded the motion to approve the minutes for the September 5, 2023, regular meeting. The motion was approved unanimously.

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

The October consent agenda included the following contracts:

- 2221 Amendment 1, *Kitsap County Prosecuting Attorney, Legal Services*
- 2363, *Hood Canal Coordinating Counsel, Hood Canal Regional PIC*

Mayor Putaansuu moved and Dr. Kirk Sell seconded the motion to approve the consent agenda. The motion was approved unanimously.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

### **HEALTH OFFICER/ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT**

#### Health Officer Update:

Dr. Gib Morrow, Health Officer, started the report by reminding the public and the Board that respiratory illness season is beginning. He said the Center for Disease Control (CDC) warned that even a mild COVID-19 surge on top of the normal flu and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) rates has the potential to strain the healthcare system significantly. The public is encouraged to stay current on vaccinations, test themselves for COVID-19 if they are experiencing symptoms, and stay at home if they are ill. Dr. Morrow said the rates of flu and RSV are currently lower than normal, but case rates and hospitalizations for COVID-19 are the highest they have been

since April 2023. He noted that accurate case rates for COVID-19 are difficult to track because of the presence of home test kits, the results of which are not typically reported to public health agencies. The home test kits, also known as antigen tests, are less sensitive than the PCR tests performed in a laboratory. Dr. Morrow advised the public to repeat the test one to two times if they test negative and have COVID-like symptoms. Vaccines are available for all three respiratory illnesses.

Next, Dr. Morrow discussed the commercialization of the 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine. The updated vaccine was approved in September; however, it is being rolled out more slowly than prior COVID-19 vaccines. He explained that the federal government is no longer distributing vaccine supplies and vaccine providers must order directly from the manufacturers at a cost, which is possibly deterring providers from administering the vaccine. Currently, several local pharmacies are offering the COVID-19 vaccine to people 12 years of age and older. The public can call pharmacies to check on the availability of the vaccine. Additionally, Peninsula Community Health Services is providing the vaccine to their patients. The Health District is working with the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) to obtain the vaccines for people as young as 6 months old. Dr. Morrow is hopeful that more healthcare providers will offer the vaccine as it becomes more widely available. He thanked the internal Health District staff, local healthcare providers, and community leaders who are helping with the Health District's immunization campaign. Details of the campaign will be provided to the Board later in today's meeting.

Dr. Morrow explained that the Community Health Assessment (CHA) is nearly complete. The Health District held a data summit on September 26<sup>th</sup> to share assessment information with community members and over 70 people attended. Attendees provided positive feedback after holding the event. In addition to the data summit, the Health District is hosting several data walks to get community feedback on the findings or issues outlined in the CHA. The first data walk event will be at the Sheridan Park Community Center in Bremerton on October 7<sup>th</sup> and other events will be held throughout October in different parts of Kitsap County.

Next, Dr. Morrow said the Health District hopes to convene the Board's Policy Committee to discuss the Health District's priorities. If Board members have any specific areas they want to address, input can be provided to Dr. Morrow or Policy Analyst Adrienne Hampton.

Dr. Morrow concluded his report by thanking the individuals participating in the Johns Hopkins healthcare assessment. The lead scientist, Dr. Tener Veenema, visited Kitsap one week ago. She attended the data summit and met with community leaders to discuss issues related to homelessness in the county. Additionally, Dr. Veenema visited the Bremerton Naval Hospital, the closure of which is still a growing concern as the hospital is underutilized. The healthcare assessment is moving into a phase of data collection called a Delphi study. The study consists of three to four rounds of surveys which allow community members to provide open-ended input on strategies to address healthcare issues. Dr. Morrow encouraged the study participants to continue their participation to allow the Health District to identify strategies for improving healthcare quality and access in Kitsap.

When given the opportunity to ask questions, Member Kutz asked if there were issues with the COVID-19 home test kits, particularly whether they are sensitive enough to detect a COVID-19 infection. Dr. Morrow said a PCR test is more sensitive in its ability to detect smaller levels of COVID-19, but getting a PCR test requires people to go through a lab or healthcare provider. He added that many of the home test kits are expired, though expiration dates for some have been extended and can still be used for home testing. Dr. Morrow said people may test negative initially then test positive in the days after, so people should continue to test themselves if they think they may have contracted COVID-19.

Dr. Kirk Sell noted that everyone has access to four free COVID-19 test kits through the federal government and that the shelf-life extension information can be found online. She asked who people should call if they test positive for the virus at home. Dr. Morrow said agencies are no longer asking people to report positive home tests, unless they are involved with a congregate living facility, school, or nursing homes. He said DOH has an online portal to report positive home tests, but because the vast majority go unreported, the information is not very valuable in detecting a new surge of COVID-19 cases. Dr. Morrow said if Kitsap residents test positive, they can call the Health District, who will then report the case to DOH.

Councilperson Hytopoulos asked if there were any programs still conducting wastewater testing for the presence of COVID-19. Dr. Morrow said there are a number of counties in the Puget Sound region doing COVID-19 wastewater testing, including Snohomish, Seattle-King, Tacoma-Pierce, Jefferson and possibly Clallam. He said rates of COVID-19 in wastewater appear to be dropping, but there are several variables to consider when determining trends, such as dilution effects due to an influx of water.

Dr. Watson thanked Dr. Morrow for explaining the challenges healthcare providers face with the commercialized COVID-19 vaccine, adding that it is costing facilities money to offer the vaccine. He said that due to these challenges, he is very concerned that there will not be adequate vaccine uptake. Dr. Watson asked if the Health District can provide the COVID-19 vaccine to facilities that would like to administer it but are unable to order it from the manufacturer directly due to their corporate structure. Dr. Morrow said healthcare providers should be able to order it through the Vaccines for Children and Adult Vaccine programs for patients who are uninsured or underinsured. He went on to say the commercialization of the COVID-19 vaccine is problematic as the cost per dose is high, and providers are required to order at least 100 doses, ultimately discouraging providers from administering the vaccine. Dr. Morrow explained that the level of urgency to provide the vaccine is not the same as during the pandemic as most people have been vaccinated multiple times; however, public health should continue to encourage providers to give the vaccine and physicians should encourage their patients to get the vaccine. Member Kutz added that he has been working with DOH on this issue, noting that if a clinic opens a full vial and is only able to administer one to two doses of the vaccine, the clinic loses a significant amount of money. While single-dose syringes are helpful in this regard, Pfizer does not offer single-doses. Member Kutz said it might be possible for providers to share the cost to meet the minimum 100-dose order requirement, noting that healthcare providers should consider the feasibility of this solution. Dr. Morrow agreed with Member Kutz that healthcare providers are more at risk financially than individual patients. A clause in the Affordable Care Act requires

preventative services to be free of charge, meaning individual patients should not have to pay for vaccine costs. Dr. Morrow encouraged physician groups to work with their insurers to determine a solution, noting that the situation is unfortunate as it is affecting the efficiency and speed of vaccine distribution and acquisition.

Chair Erickson asked if the Health District tracks overdose deaths in Kitsap and whether that information could be provided to the Board. Dr. Morrow said overdose events and deaths are tracked and that the rates are increasing. Chair Erickson asked that the overdose death data be reported to the Board on a regular basis because the issue is escalating, and Dr. Morrow agreed to regularly report the data.

There was no further comment.

**\*\* POST-MEETING EDITOR'S NOTE \*\***

Dr. Morrow would like to clarify that delays in the finalization of death certificates, due to toxicology testing and very small monthly numbers, may make timely and regular reporting of overdose deaths more problematic.

Administrator Update:

Keith Grellner, Administrator, directed Board members to the full report of the Health District's 2022 Accountability Audit. Mr. Grellner said this information was shared with the Board previously, but he wanted to ensure the public and Health District staff were informed as well. The audits were successful again this year and the State Auditor did not produce any findings. Mr. Grellner said accountability was particularly challenging because in 2022, the federal COVID-19 funding ended. Federal funding has more restrictions and conditions, and emergency response money poses additional challenges. Mr. Grellner congratulated the Accounting team on successfully managing the funds. The Health District's Accounting team consists of Melissa Laird, Denise Turner, Linda Pandino, Beverly Abney, and James Archer.

Mr. Grellner explained that on Monday, September 18, the Health District's public health nurses and Communicable Disease staff, in coordination with DOH field consultants, conducted an outreach event to several homeless encampments and residents in Bremerton. The goal of the event was to fill the gaps in the continuum of care that people experiencing homelessness are facing. During the event, 26 people received hepatitis A and B vaccines and had blood drawn for HIV and syphilis testing. Additionally, 52 naloxone kits were distributed. Mr. Grellner thanked Kelsey Stedman, Communicable Disease Program Manager, Communicable Disease staff, and the DOH field consultants for a successful event.

Next, Mr. Grellner said that last week, the Health District submitted the documentation to apply for reaccreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). The Health District has been accredited since 2015. The agency is one of 320 local public health jurisdictions nationwide and one of five local health jurisdictions statewide to achieve national accreditation. Mr. Grellner noted that over 40 Health District staff helped in some way to develop and compile the documentation needed for PHAB and thanked everyone who helped with the reaccreditation

efforts. The Board will be updated as the Health District receives information from PHAB, and a presentation will likely be given once the reaccreditation certificate is received.

Mr. Grellner concluded his report by explaining the Board's Finance Committee will be meeting tomorrow, October 4, to review the draft Health District budget for 2024. Once the Finance Committee's feedback is incorporated into the draft budget, a full presentation will be given to the Board at the November meeting. The Committee will also be reviewing the Environmental Health fee proposal from the Division Director. That proposal will also be brought to the Board at the November meeting.

When given the opportunity to comment, Member Jackson said he appreciates the positive feedback the Health District received from the State Auditor's office. He wanted to ensure it was publicly acknowledged that the Accounting team did a great job in ensuring the financial records were organized and available to the auditors. Mr. Grellner said the finance team welcomes accountability audits and that they take it as a challenge. He thanked Member Jackson for his comments.

Member Kutz explained that many people do not understand how difficult it is to get a clean audit. The auditors search and know where to look. The COVID-19 funding and the frequent changes in the funding's requirements would make obtaining a clean audit extremely challenging. Member Kutz commended the Health District's staff on the amount of work completed for the reaccreditation process. He added that not only is it a significant volume of work on top of the day-to-day work that must be done, the elements of the accreditation requirements must also be integrated into the organization's culture. Member Kutz said the amount of time and effort put into reaccreditation is worth it as it demonstrates the high quality work the Health District does. Chair Erickson agreed that accreditation is important, not only to obtain it, but also to maintain it through the reaccreditation process.

There was no further comment.

## **IMMUNIZATION CAMPAIGN**

Yolanda Fong, Community Health Division Director, began the presentation by highlighting the continued importance of immunizations in public health strategy to reduce the spread of communicable diseases. Ms. Fong displayed a graph showing the number of measles cases reported each year in the United States. She noted that in 2019, there were over 1,200 cases of measles across 31 states, the biggest number of cases since 1992. Ms. Fong said public health officials are monitoring disease trends because it could be an indication of reemergence of diseases thought to be eradicated in the United States. Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease and the case increase in 2019 highlights the need for communities to be immunized.

Next, Ms. Fong discussed school immunization requirements. She explained that routine childhood vaccines are administered from infancy to school-age, meaning schools have an important part to play in terms of immunization rates. In Washington, children are required to have certain immunizations to attend schools and it is up to the school's administration to ensure

the requirements are being followed. Ms. Fong said there are some options for vaccine exemptions, though most exemptions require both the healthcare provider and the parent to sign and submit the exemption for consideration. She then displayed a form from the DOH website that shows which vaccines are required for each age group for the 2023 to 2024 school year.

Ms. Fong went on to explain the impacts of COVID-19 on childhood vaccination rates. In 2022, DOH published a report that showcased the implications of COVID-19 on routine childhood immunizations. Across the state of Washington, children were below pre-pandemic levels for vaccine administration and vaccine coverage declined in all age groups. In Kitsap County, between June 2019 and December 2021, the rate of fully vaccinated children between 19 and 35 months decreased by 28%. At the end of 2022, DOH published an update that showed the same age groups saw slight increases in vaccination coverage across the state and in fully vaccinated children in Kitsap. Ms. Fong said this data shows people are moving back into routine healthcare, so it is the ideal time to consider sending positive messages around immunizations and ensuring people have access to reliable information about vaccines.

Next, Ms. Fong said the Health District is launching a community immunization campaign, one of several public health strategies being used by the agency's Immunization program. The goal of the campaign is to increase awareness of immunization information to allow parents to make informed decisions about vaccinations.

Tad Sooter, Public Information Officer, continued the presentation by explaining that the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on immunization rates and perceptions surrounding immunizations. The pandemic provided important lessons that can be utilized in vaccine promotion efforts: healthcare providers are a widely trusted source of vaccine information, people prefer information and inspiration over directives, and people are more receptive to messaging when they feel represented and respected. Mr. Sooter added that the Kitsap community as a whole, and especially the healthcare community, supports immunization. When the first COVID-19 vaccines were distributed, nearly 600 volunteers and 40 healthcare facilities in Kitsap offered their time and services to administer the vaccine to the public. With their help, almost 200,000 Kitsap residents received the vaccine within one year.

Mr. Sooter explained that as the conversation is expanded to support routine immunization across all age groups, the Health District's campaign will utilize the lessons reinforced during the pandemic. These positive messages will feature a diverse group of healthcare professionals to share information about immunization and the importance of vaccines. Pictures of the healthcare professionals and their quotes will accompany the messages, which will be posted on billboards, ferries, advertisements, and mobile platforms. Mr. Sooter displayed examples of what the messages will look like. He added that when speaking with healthcare providers about this campaign strategy, the Health District has received resounding support and people are excited to participate in the project.

Next, Mr. Sooter said the campaign materials will direct the public to an online landing page that provides straightforward information. The information available will include vaccine recommendations, where people can get vaccines, and how people can access their vaccine

records. Mr. Sooter displayed a mock webpage for the Board, noting that the Health District purchased the domain HealthyKitsap.org.

Mr. Sooter explained that the Health District is currently collecting community input on key messages and trusted messengers. Community members can use stickers to provide feedback on an interactive poster. The interactive posters have been brought to various community events, such as the Kitsap County Fair, Marvin Williams Center, and back-to-school resource fairs.

In concluding the presentation, Mr. Sooter said the Health District is currently conducting outreach to local healthcare professionals to determine who would like to be a spokesperson for the campaign. The campaign team has contacted professionals at major healthcare systems, independent practices, emergency medical service agencies, and schools in an effort to reach a wide variety of professionals. Mr. Sooter said the Health District hopes to launch the campaign by the end of 2023. He noted that the project has the potential for additional phases and the framework from the campaign can be used for other focused campaigns.

Member Kutz asked if schools provided feedback on immunization rates and the number of children who were not allowed into schools because they did not meet the immunization requirements. Ms. Fong said schools have not provided direct feedback yet. She went on to say the Health District is currently working on integrating school vaccine data with the state immunization information system. This project has been piloted in schools throughout the various districts. Historically, schools have been unable to provide immunization rates until after the school year because, during the rest of the year, school nurses are working to fill immunization gaps for students.

Dr. Kirk Sell said the campaign seems to be focused on children, but the examples of messages displayed to the Board showed adult spokespeople. She said that children and adults have different vaccine needs and asked how the Health District would merge those two types of messaging. Ms. Fong said during the first stage of planning for the campaign, the team wanted to start broad because they were unsure of how vaccine messaging would be received by the community. Parents are the people who decide whether to immunize their children, so the campaign team wanted to focus on trusted messengers, see how the community received vaccine messaging, and put emphasis on the accessibility of information.

Dr. Kirk Sell said when deciding to immunize their children, parents evaluate the risks to the children and themselves. Parents see that most other children are vaccinated, so they make the decision not to immunize their children. She asked how the Health District would reach those parents with the larger community story when it comes to childhood vaccinations. Ms. Fong emphasized the importance of sharing data about disease outbreaks, such as measles, to illustrate the concern about the reemergence of diseases. During the measles outbreak, most cases were in unvaccinated communities, so it is important to talk about the risks and the impacts these decisions have on the community.

Member Jackson said school districts deal with a lot of other things that create community divisions, such as misinformation. The Health District may consider ways they can support

schools in getting vaccine information to parents. Ms. Fong agreed and said the Immunization team has been building closer partnerships with schools. They have been doing things to help relieve schools of the stress around providing parents with information on vaccines, such as hosting information booths at back-to-school events.

Member Kutz said because we got so far behind in childhood immunizations during the pandemic, we cannot expect them to be caught up by the beginning of the school year. The primary goal is getting children immunized, but if parents feel backed into a corner, they will likely use an exemption. Member Kutz went on to say that school nurses should not be expected to fill the gap for immunizations as they already have a heavy workload. Ms. Fong agreed and said school districts use various vaccine systems, some utilize the school nurses while others rely on other staff.

Chair Erickson asked if the Health District considered marketing the campaign to children. Ms. Fong explained that the campaign was broken down into two phases. The first phase was to gauge the temperature of the community and to focus on generalized positive messaging around vaccines. The second phase will be determining which populations are under-vaccinated. Ms. Fong said there are innovative ideas around engaging children, such as drawing contests, and that the Health District would consider those ideas. Dr. Watson added that it may be valuable to focus on preventative care for children, rather than just vaccines. He said once they are in the clinics for things like well child check-ups, providers can work on encouraging parents to vaccinate their children. Mr. Sooter addressed Chair Erickson's comment about marketing to children. He said during the pandemic, it became evident that there is a very strong reaction when messages, particularly when they are related to vaccines, are directed towards children. As this conversation about immunizations starts again, the goal is to restore trust in household decisionmakers and show examples of trusted figures in the community who believe in and support immunizations. Chair Erickson agreed. Dr. Watson added that, in his experience, the most effective way to encourage parents to immunize their children is to tell them that he is a parent and has fully immunized his children. He said it may be valuable for parents to relay their stories as spokespeople.

Commissioner Rolfes asked if the Health District has a role to play in helping adults get the flu or COVID-19 vaccine. Mr. Sooter said the Health District has sent out messaging on flu and COVID-19 vaccinations this fall, and that information can be found on the agency's website. For those that do not want to use the internet, the Health District encourages people to talk to their healthcare provider or a local pharmacy. They can also call the Health District if they have questions or need additional resources. Ms. Fong added that the vaccine campaign's landing page was developed to have all vaccine information in one place, including information on adult vaccines, to allow the public to access information easily.

Member Kutz said, in his experience, pharmacies are too understaffed to consistently provide vaccines. He said the Health District should attempt to involve primary care providers instead of pharmacies to ensure patients do not leave without receiving their immunization.

There was no further comment.



**EXECUTIVE SESSION TO EVALUATE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APPLICANT FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT PER RCW 42.30.110(G)**

Chair Erickson announced that the Board would recess to the closed executive session at 11:21 a.m. to discuss the qualifications of an applicant for public employment. She noted that the Board may reconvene after the closed executive session, or it may adjourn.

At 11:45 a.m., Chair Erickson extended the executive session for ten minutes.

At 11:55 a.m., the closed executive session ended, and Chair Erickson reconvened the Board. Member Kutz moved and Commissioner Rolfes seconded the motion to offer the position of Health District Administrator to Yolanda Fong. The motion was approved unanimously.

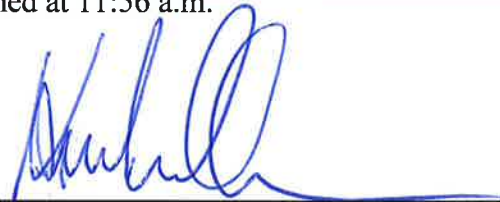
There was no further comment.

**ADJOURN**

There was no further business; the meeting adjourned at 11:56 a.m.



**Becky Erickson**  
Kitsap Public Health Board



**Keith Grellner**  
Administrator

**Board Members Present:** *Mayor* Becky Erickson; *Commissioner* Charlotte Garrido; *Member* Drayton Jackson; *Member* Dr. Tara Kirk Sell; *Mayor* Robert Putaansuu; *Member* Jolene Sullivan; *Member* Dr. Michael Watson; *Mayor* Greg Wheeler.

**Board Members Absent:** *None.*

**Community Members Present:** *None.*

**Staff Present:** Angie Berger, *Management Analyst, Administrative Services*; Dana Bierman, *Program Manager, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention*; Margo Chang, *Administrative Assistant, Administrative Services*; Elizabeth Davis, *Program Manager, Immunizations and General Communicable Disease*; Yolanda Fong, *Director, Community Health Division*; Adrienne Hampton, *Policy, Planning, and Innovation Analyst, Administration*; Melissa Hartman, *Communications Specialist, Communications*; Karen Holt, *Program Manager, Human Resources*; John Kiess, *Director, Environmental Health Division*; Emily Main, *Program Coordinator 1, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention*; Tad Sooter, *Communications Coordinator and Public Information Officer, Communications*; Alexandra Tiemeyer, *Public Health Nurse Supervisor, Communicable Disease.*

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**Zoom Attendees:** *See attached.*

**Kitsap Public Health Board Meeting (Virtual Attendance)**

<b>Webinar ID</b>	<b>Actual Start Time</b>	<b>Attendee Count</b>
861 8605 2497	10/3/2023 10:30	19

<b>NAME</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>JOINED BY PHONE</b>
Amy Anderson	Siri Kushner	None
Gus Bell	Brian M	
Jessica Chen	Michelle McMillan	
George Fine	Carin Onarheim	
April Fisk	Kayla Petersen	
Grant Holdcroft	Suzanne Plemmons	
Wendy Inouye	Steve Powell	
Thomas Jury	Kelsey Stedman	
John Kiess	KIRO Newsradio	
Sarah Kinnear		