

BOARD OF HEALTH
Community Room, John F. Kennedy Middle School: 100 Bridge Road
July 23, 2019 Minutes

BOH Members Present: Joanne Levin; Suzanne Smith; Cynthia Suopis; William Hargraves; and Laurent Levy

BOH Members Absent: None

Staff: Merridith O’Leary, Director, Jennifer Meyer, RN, Public Health Nurse, and Melissa Roberts-Cote, BOH Clerk

Staff Absent: None

Meeting opened July 23, 2019 at 5:31 pm by Joanne Levin

I. Public Comment Session: Public Comment had two speakers who spoke in regard to smoke free downtown.

II. Review Minutes

A. Meeting Minutes from May 23, 2019.

Motion: Approved: Motion made by William Hargraves to accept the minutes, seconded by Cynthia Suopis. All were in favor (5-0).

Meeting Minutes from June 27, 2019.

Motion: Approved: Motion made by Suzanne Smith to accept the minutes, seconded by Cynthia Suopis. All were in favor (5-0).

III. Discussion: Measles: Exemption; discuss current law and best practices moving forward

Joanne Levin gave an overview of the resolution that the Northampton City Council approved on June 20th to encourage the Northampton Board of Health and the Massachusetts State Legislature to take action to increase measles immunization rates in our communities.

Joanne Levin reviewed for board members the research she has done regarding best practices to increase immunization rates. Articles were found through the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and reputable medical and public health journals. She found that various states have different approaches around religious and philosophical exemptions and how they are administered. While Massachusetts allows a parent to write a note and send it to a child’s school if an exemption is requested, some other states do not have any religious or philosophical exemptions (such as West Virginia, California, New York and Washington). Michigan has a waiver so that if a person or parent wants an exemption of any kind they have to be counseled by the Department of Health. Joanne Levin shared an article about vaccination policies and the various rates of exemptions. States which have more strict exemption policies showed lower rates of exemptions. She spoke about some of the techniques behind increasing immunization rates through outreach by physician offices. Joanne Levin noted that Jonathan Schwab, MD, of Northampton Area Pediatrics (NAP) agreed to attend the next Board Meeting to answer any questions the Board Member may have. He might be able to help with knowing the reasoning of local immunization hesitant families, as well as to collaborate on possible outreach for families to talk one on one about immunizations and risks.

Northampton Public Health Nurse Jenny Meyer, RN was in attendance with colleague Celia Maysles, RN, UMass Amherst and spoke about immunization hesitancy and how it is a hot topic currently among families with young children. They both participated in a community based education program/discussion forum that they believe is a model for having open discussion with a concerned family/parent group to help get the correct information to parents about immunizations.

Celia Maysles spoke about a community based education program/discussion forum that has been one of the more successful approaches that she has seen. This approach was put into practice at her child's day care with good success. She spoke about the mis-information that her local daycare posted on their social media. They held a community based education program/discussion forum that included 2 mental health professionals, a nurse and many concerned family members. The group was an intimate group with ground rules to promote non-judgmental discussion. Eventually the daycare facility changed its policies in regards to circulation of anti-vaccination information. In addition, the directors voiced increased confidence in discussing the importance of vaccination with the caretakers of the children who attend their facility. Celia spoke to Dr. Schwab in an informal setting and he expressed interest in a collaboration on this approach. Celia talked about the key points during the parent meeting and what would happen if there was an outbreak and how this would be addressed. Jennifer Meyer felt it would be a good model to follow in Northampton's community.

Another approach discussed was using the example of Alabama, Arkansas, Minnesota, Michigan and West Virginia in requiring that exemptions be logged at the Board of Health. This approach would allow both an increased administrative barrier to exemptions as well as increased opportunity for education. A Massachusetts database for immunizations (MIIS) currently exists, but it only tracks vaccines given, not unimmunized children nor education opportunities provided. Jennifer Meyer would like to see a Board of Health log which would complete the MIIS information in presenting a full picture of vaccination status for all school children in the community.

Jennifer Meyer would like to partner with Cecelia Maysles and Dr. Jonathan Schwab to hold community based education program/discussion forums to provide education to parents and the community to increase our immunization rates and decrease our risk for outbreak.

Suzanne Smith asked if it is possible to disseminate more data. She stated that she thinks disseminating information relating to the nature of measles (consequences of infection, and its highly contagious communicable nature) would increase vaccination rates.

Joanne Levin asked Jennifer Meyer about whether the Department of Health holds MMR vaccination clinics. Due to the nature of how vaccines are provided in Massachusetts, Jennifer stated she believes vaccination uptake is best when offered through primary care providers rather than in an isolated setting. Prior to Mass Health, vaccination clinics used to be a standard practice in the Department of Health. However, most childhood vaccines are free, supported by the state of MA, and she now spends times helping families who need vaccine access and who lack insurance, enroll their children in Mass Health and connect with a provider who can provide full well-child care and establish a health-care relationship. Jennifer did state, in the event of an outbreak and mass vaccination effort that may be required as directed by the state, she would have the capacity to hold clinics and support other local clinics (as she did with Smith College and the Meningitis B vaccination response).

Additionally, Smith College is no longer accepting religious vaccine exemptions the incoming freshman class. The Northampton School Department is additionally requiring exemption forms be re-filed annually rather than only at entry into the school system.

Joanne Levin is going to compile a list of measures to move forward on. Director O’Leary will ask Karen Jarvis-Vance, RN, City of Northampton Schools Health and Safety Director to come to discuss this with the board as well.

IV. Discussion: Vaping in our Community

Melinda Calianos, Program Manager, Hampshire/Franklin Tobacco Free Community Partnership Collaborative for Educational Services, explained her scope of practice to the board. She states that she looks at ways to create smoke-free environments for public housing, multi-unit dwellings, and housing authorities and to provide smoking cessation resources for smoking and vaping through teaching and education.

Joanne Levin explained that the Northampton Board of Health is considering 2 options with regard to flavored tobacco and electronic nicotine devices (ENDS) in their Northampton tobacco establishments. Joanne asked for Melinda’s opinion on what are the best practices around removing flavored tobacco and ENDS from youth. Melinda Calianos does not have the answer, however she recommends a comprehensive program using education, smoking cessation, and data collection. Melinda stated that using a comprehensive program would help with different approaches as every person learns differently. She also identified that menthol, mint and wintergreen are favorite flavors for youth, and they prefer to vape with these flavors. Joanne Levin asked if were to decrease the availability of flavors, and assuming that youth get ENDS from local shops, would this decrease smoking or vaping with youth? Melinda Calianos stated that smoking rates have increased in youth for the first time in 30 years and that 78% of products are purchased from brick and mortar stores. Suzanne Smith stated there is evidence that ENDS do help to reduce smoking of tobacco for some adults, and if all of the flavors were removed to tobacconist establishments, it might make it more difficult for the person who is using this method to quit smoking to access ENDS.

Director O’Leary asked what they are doing in the schools to curb vaping and smoking. Melinda described a focus group in the schools where youth are working together on a campaign to get the message out to the school community, and she showed some of their materials. The student group wanted posters that contained facts that came from a reliable source, and stating that vaping and cigarettes cause cancer. There are two programs in this campaign: 1. “The Truth Initiative “ which is a tobacco education program that provides counseling without parental consent, and 2. “My Life My Quit” which provides online information and specially trained counselors who work with youth to quit vaping. This fall they are going to be getting information to the schools about using “My Life My Quit”.

V. Discussion: Smoking in Pulaski Park

Director O’Leary discussed soft enforcement of the non-smoking policy in city parks which is already on the books, which will begin in August. The Health Department will observe where people are smoking in the park. William Hargraves, Cynthia Suopis, and Laurent Levy have agreed to participate and conduct observation in the park to support this initiative. In October, upon completion of a designated smoking area, the Health Inspectors will work collaboratively with the Police

Department to conduct educational/enforcement in the park two times a week to patrons who are smoking.

Suzanne Smith provided information from Colorado where a smoke-free pedestrian mall includes a ban on vaping. She stated that they have a positive slogan “Everyone Can Have Clean Air” which gives a positive tone, allowing for a smoke-free and family friendly place. The Colorado signage is simple and the smoke-free area has a defined perimeter. Colorado worked with public groups to create signage, had social engagement, and the rule did take some time to get up and running. Suzanne Smith opined that the Board of Health should work with a group of people who have a vested interest in downtown to make sure that everyone is heard. Director O’Leary agreed that the positive message that Colorado presented is a good way to proceed. She suggested that the Board invite a representative from Downtown Northampton Association (DNA) and the Elliot House, then possibly in November have a public forum in City Hall (downtown location) to discuss the findings of this pilot and discuss smoke free downtown going forward.

Meeting Closed: Motion to Close Meeting: Motion to close the Board of Health meeting by Laurent Levy, seconded by Cynthia Suopis, all in favor (5-0)

Meeting closed at 8:05 pm.

The next scheduled Board of Health Meeting: August 19, 2019
Melissa Roberts-Cote, BOH Clerk

BOARD OF HEALTH

Date: July 23, 2019

Hearing Room, City Hall, 210 Main Street, Northampton

Meeting Document List

The following documents were available to the Board of Health during their scheduled meeting.

These documents are available for review at the:

Northampton Health Department, 212 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060

- Meeting Agenda
- May 23, 2019 Minutes
- June 27, 2019 Minutes
- Key Points from Concerned Families Meeting Notes