



**BENTON-FRANKLIN HEALTH DISTRICT  
BOARD OF HEALTH**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

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**IN ATTENDANCE**

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<b>Benton</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Commissioner Delvin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jason Zaccaria, Administrator & BOH Executive Secretary
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Commissioner Small	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dr. Amy Person, Health Officer
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Commissioner McKay	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lisa Wight, Sr. Human Resources Manager
<b>Franklin</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Commissioner Peck	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jeff Jones, Sr. Finance Manager
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Commissioner Didier	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rick Dawson, Sr. Surveillance & Investigation Manager
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Commissioner Mullen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Carla Prock, Sr. Healthy People & Communities Manager
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Janae Parent, Administrative Services Manager
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Diane Medick, Administrative Assistant
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eric Elsethagen, Information Systems & Security
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nikki Ostergaard, Assessment Coordinator & EOC PIO
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Peyton Jones, Admin Assistant
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Visitor – Lars Richins, PTE Local 17 Union Rep
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Visitor – Leslie Rivera, WSNA Union Rep
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Visitor – Annette Cary, Tri-City Herald Editor

**CALL TO ORDER**

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Commissioner Delvin called the meeting to order at 1:31p.m.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC**

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- a. Commissioner Delvin noted that the meeting was originally canceled as there was not anything important on the agenda, in the sense of business of the Health District, however Commissioner McKay had received several phone calls from members of the public wishing to express their concerns with the Board of Health.
- b. Commissioner Delvin further clarified that if there are concerns about masking mandates in schools, that the Health District does not have jurisdiction over this mandate, but rather the state does through the Governor, Secretary of Health, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).
- c. Commissioner McKay expressed frustration with the Governor's direction that funding be taken away if guidelines are not adhered to, and that as Commissioners and the local health board members, their hands are tied.
- d. Commissioner Peck received a couple of phone calls from constituents in Pasco about masking, and one commenter asked that the Board of Health use its authority to have a mandatory mask order for everyone in the Tri-Cities.
- e. Commissioner Delvin opened the meeting up for public comment. No public comments were provided.



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**NEW BUSINESS:**

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**COVID-19 Updates – Dr. Amy Person & Staff**

- a. Dr. Person began the update noting that it is important to be transparent and allow the public the opportunity to provide their opinions, adding that actions are guided by law, by the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). The authority that the Board of Health and the Health Officer have to control communicable disease comes not from a mandate from the Governor or a Declaration of Emergency, but rather by Washington State law.
- b. The COVID-19 situation has worsened since last month due to the delta variant which is essentially the main circulating variant. It unfortunately has led to a significant increase in positive cases and hospitalizations. It has been mentioned many times over the last two weeks about the difficulties the local hospital system is experiencing including staff shortages due to burnout, job changes, contracting COVID from community or household exposures, and in response to the Governor's recent mandate for healthcare workers to be vaccinated.
- c. The hospitals are full. Full is defined as staffed beds, so there may be physical beds available, but there is no staff to support those beds. Hospitals are full across the state and across the United States. Of those that are hospitalized, 95% of them that have COVID or COVID like illness, are unvaccinated. The Health District continues to hear rumors that a majority of those who are hospitalized are vaccinated which is false. With the delta variant, even people who are vaccinated may be at risk because of the significantly high transmissibility.
- d. To improve the situation, the community should increase the number of people vaccinated in the bi-county area. The Health District has been working with several healthcare partners to increase the access to vaccine including having the hospital care systems enrolling more of the care clinic providers to become vaccine providers. Getting the community vaccinated takes time, so the Health District needs its community to follow masking recommendations.
- e. There are several large events and gatherings going on. Some organizers have voluntarily chosen to cancel events, others have reached out to find out recommendations for large events, and the Health District has reached out to some directly if they had not heard from them otherwise. The Health District's recommendation has been not to hold large events, but if canceling an event is not possible then requiring masking would be a good mitigation strategy.
- f. As a Health Officer, Dr. Person joined other Health Officers across the state in asking the Governor to reinstate a state masking mandate to have consistent control across the state. If state action is not taken, Dr. Person recommends reinstating a local mask mandate. This is an emergency situation and the Health District is seeing cases rise exponentially and local hospitals will not be able to maintain the burden of those.



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- g. Rick Dawson stated the Health District is seeing a small uptick in vaccinations, about three quarters of a percent. There has also been an increase in providers administering or requests to administer vaccine. In Benton County the current case rate is higher than it has ever been since the start of the pandemic and Franklin County is approaching an all-time high as well.
- h. R. Dawson further added the hospital network across eastern Washington is seeing similar numbers, which is making it hard to move patients to receive care.
- i. Commissioner Delvin asked Dr. Person what percentage of population has had COVID or tested positive in relation to the amount of people that have been vaccinated. Dr. Person said this could be done, but not sure what it would demonstrate. Commissioner Delvin followed up asking about herd immunity and when the factor of the number of people having had COVID would play a role in this situation. Dr. Person said that the prevalence of spread is about 10%, which is likely an under estimate since testing was not initially available when the pandemic first started. It also does not consider re-infection which can occur based on an earlier variant.
- j. Commissioner Peck asked Dr. Person to clarify masking orders for schools, asking first if Dr. Person has the authority to issue a mandatory mask order for schools under the statute. Dr. Person stated yes, that the statute allows for the Health Officer or Board of Health to take any actions deemed necessary to control communicable disease. However, the Health Officer and the Board of Health do not have authority to take measures that would increase the spread of communicable disease, so the mask mandate cannot be removed.
- k. Commissioner Peck asked R. Dawson to state the numbers of the current case rates for Benton and Franklin counties. R. Dawson stated that the overall case rate for the two counties is 881 per 100,000. Currently that number in Benton County is 873 and in Franklin County the number is 898. The previous high rate for Benton County was 816 and Franklin County was 1,209.
- l. Commissioner Peck reported expressing concern over the last several meetings about the need to increase public outreach in getting vaccinated. On Monday Commissioner Peck did a live spot on KONA radio with guest participant Dr. Brian York who is the chair of Kadlec's Infection Control Committee. The purpose of the show was to do live call in, so that anyone who had concerns about vaccinations could call in. Commissioner Peck said there were several good calls and that Dr. York was successful about dispelling myths about vaccine safety, and whether it was safe for expecting women. Commissioner Peck thanked Dr. York for giving time to participate on the show.
- m. Commissioner Small would like to continue to kick out additional awareness, adding that the community really needs to get educated on getting the vaccine. Commissioner Small also added that one of the vaccines is expected to be fully approved around Labor Day.



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- n. Commissioner McKay agreed that people should get educated about vaccination, but at the end of the day is not a fan of government mandates. Additionally, Commissioner McKay expressed frustration with how states are handling the pandemic differently.
- o. Commissioner Didier asked what the status was of influenza and if there were currently any cases of it in the bi-county area. Dr. Person said that influenza is not a reportable disease, but deaths due to influenza are. Some laboratories voluntarily provide influenza test result data, but the Health District has not received any reports yet.
- p. Commissioner McKay asked about a video of a doctor that spoke with an Indiana school board about an animal-based virus versus non-animal based. Dr. Person had not seen the video but would be willing to listen to it and provide feedback on it. Commissioner McKay is going to send Dr. Person a copy of the video.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

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Date of next meeting will be September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

**ADJOURNMENT**

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Chairman Delvin adjourned the meeting at 2:06p.m.

*Signature on file*

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Commissioner Jerome Delvin  
Chairman of the Board

*Signature on file*

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Jason Zaccaria  
Executive Secretary

