



**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH  
MARCH 1, 2022**

**A meeting of the Boston Board of Health (Board) was held on Tuesday March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 by remote participation pursuant to An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency.**

**Board Members Present**

Manny Lopes, Chair, Rebecca Gutman, Phillomin Laptiste, Guale Valdez, Dr. Jennifer Childs-Roshak, John Fernandez, Kate Walsh

**Others Present**

Dr. Bisola Ojikutu, PJ McCann, Julia Frederick, Batool Raza, Becca Gutman, Johanna Kaiser, Michele Clark, Sarimer Sanchez, Stacey Kokaram, Adam Gaffin, Alex Karsos, Amanda Borne, Amanda Curley, Andrea Novick, Andrew Karedes, Andy Eilers, Anisasa Ray, Anne McHugh, Anne Noel, Arielle Mitropoloy, B. Conley, Mark Harrington Jr., Anissa Ray, Kathryn Hall, Tim Harrington, Gerry Thomas, Mary Crotty, Hilary Rasch, Dan Dooley, Triniese Polk, Mia Robles, Donald Osgood Sr., Boston First Responders United, Sarah Horsley, Marilyn Morrissey, Leon Bethune, Christine Pontus, Sean Cotter, Nancy Lessin, Roselaine Koech, Nick Mutter, Joe Folsom, SE Bradshaw, Frankie Rowley, Dianna Ploss, Puneet Sharma, Brad Blake, Brendan Duca, Cameron Currie, Cammie Browne, Caroline McHugh, Caroline Roscoe, Casey Brown, Catherine Qu, Catie Burbage, Chris Corbo, Cindy Gatta-Hurley, Conor Deneen, Courtney Urick, Daniel Cowan, Dante Spurlock, Derek Oliver, Diamond Dan, Diana Ploss, Emma Pettit, Eric Wildman, Erin Serino, Etna Tiburcio, Evan Bradford, Fouad El-Nemr, Gabrielle Emanuel, George Phaneuf, Gerry Thomas, Gintautas, Matt Gummersbach, Hank Anderson, Hilary Rash, Jack Moldave, James Tice, Janette Desenclos, Jeanne Carroll, Jeff Keane, Jenn Wong, Jennifer Tracey, Jeremy C. Fox, Jeremy Sana, Jessicah Pierre, Joanne McLaughlin, John Lydon, John Mosley, John Paul Gervais, Johnna Murphy, Jon Latino, Johathan Haines, Josh Filipowski, Julia Cheila, Julie Joyce, Julien Farland, Kara Lennon, Lisa Karakelis, Kathryn Hall, Kristen McCosh, Kristie McManus, Kristina Rex, Krystal Garcia, Kyle Gay, Lana Habash, Lara Seina Jirmanus, Laura Ferrari, Lauren Bennett, Leon Bethune, Luis Matute, Luke Gordon, Marc Jackson, Maria Santos, Marily Morrissey, Mary Corrigan, Mary Crotty, Matt Anderson, Matthew Broude, Mea Allen, Melissa Hector, Mia Robles, Nancy Lessin, Nicholas Medearis, Nick Johnson, Nick Mutter, Omar Boukili, Omar Khoshafa, Shannon Rolston, Sharon Harrison, Shawn Sullivan, Simon Muchoi, Sonna Obiorah, Stephen Mark Riggs, Susannah Sudborough, Tegan Evans, Tom

Lane, Tori Cowger, Vanessa Manzi, Yasmine Raddassi, Pritesh Patel, Randy Greely, Rita Nieves, Helen Ayanian, Sarah Horsley, SE Bradshaw, Sean Cotter.

**Proceedings**  
**Chairperson's Opening Remarks**

Chairperson Lopes: Hello and welcome, everyone, to this meeting of the Board of Health, I appreciate our Board members making themselves available. Given the quickly evolving state of our metrics and the state of the COVID-19 pandemic, I did want to give the Board the opportunity to receive an update about the status of the pandemic as well as the emergency interventions that have been put in place to address it.

I again want to thank Dr. Ojikutu and the Commission taking a leadership role on so many public health fronts and truly appreciate the leadership of Mayor Wu and partnership across City government in responding to this most recent surge in the pandemic.

I look forward to getting an update about the pandemic and the mitigation strategies BPHC has put in place to keep Boston safe.

This meeting is being conducted by remote participation as authorized by state law and any so any votes will be taken by a roll call of the members.

In keeping with our usual practice, members of the public are welcomed to observe the proceedings and Board staff will use the moderating features on the Zoom application to keep all on mute other than Board members and BPHC presenters.

Now I will turn it to Dr. Ojikutu for the COVID-19 update and discussion.

**Executive Office Report**

Dr. Ojikutu: Thank you, Chairman Lopes and members of the Board for today's discussion and for your ongoing partnership throughout the pandemic.

Before engaging in a discussion about the indoor mask mandate, I'd like to share some updates on Covid-19, and I will have my colleagues Batool Raza, our General Counsel, and Dr. Sarimer Sanchez, our Medical Director for the Infectious Disease Bureau, speak as well.

Over the past two years, the Boston Public Health Commission, in collaboration with the Board of Health, has developed and executed a number of immediate and long-term strategies to curb the spread of COVID-19, improve access to information, care, and vaccines, and distribute these resources equitably across Boston's diverse communities. They include: bringing vaccines and boosters directly to communities with high positivity and high barriers to access through community-based vaccine clinics, distributing at-home rapid test kits to community partners and directly to residents in neighborhoods hit hardest by the pandemic, and setting up and supporting new testing sites across the city, under the authority that the Board of Health delegated to BPHC under the COVID-19 public health emergency declaration, BPHC issued emergency public

health orders as temporary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and reduce severe illness and death.

After the conclusion of the state-level COVID-19 emergency declaration, emergency orders at the local level were necessary to respond to the Delta and Omicron variants and subsequent surges that we observed by continuing to closely follow our metrics and the latest public health information and expertise.

These 2021 public health orders included the face coverings order, the eviction moratorium, the order declaring substance use disorder and homelessness, and the since rescinded B together order requiring vaccination in certain indoor spaces. All of these measures were necessary, consistent with our statutory duties and authority, and were guided by the best available public health data, the needs of the community, as well as medical and infectious disease expertise.

Because of the city's Covid-19 response efforts and the recent declining prevalence and severity of the pandemic, I am optimistic as I present this update to you on the status of Covid-19 in Boston.

The posted presentation was made to the board. Notes included:

Our City's key metrics are all trending in the right direction, and are all below our established thresholds of concern.

Demand for community testing has gone down significantly since the height of the omicron surge. BPHC continues to support several accessible walk-in testing sites across the city, and continue to urge people to get tested when they have symptoms, have been exposed to COVID-19, or will be in large gatherings or gatherings with vulnerable populations.

Vaccines continue to be the most important tool we have to slow the spread of COVID-19

There are significant racial disparities in booster uptake among children. BPHC is working to engage community partners, have open discussions with parents, and remove any barriers to vaccination.

Boosters are critical for preventing against severe disease and hospitalization. I encourage anyone who has not yet been boosted, to do so.

Lopes: Any questions from the Board about these updates?

Lopes: Regarding ages 5-11, what are the best practices that you've learned about how to work with that population and partner with schools to get our younger population fully vaccinated?

Dr. Ojikutu: That's a great question. Working with community partners has been incredibly important, and having one-on-one conversations with parents and caregivers as well. We're working to correct misinformation that is unfortunately still out there. We are also being very clear about why we think vaccination is important in younger age groups, so it is about health communication, as well as reaching out to communities who may not necessarily have access, looking at channels of communication that other people may not be utilizing.

Lopes: Thank you; any other questions or comments from the Board.

Valdez: Were the three criteria that you identified before the BPHC would start revising COVID restrictions met?

Dr. Ojikutu: Yes; we have been below that threshold since February 18<sup>th</sup>, the day the B Together order was rescinded.

Lopes: Let's continue with Dr. Ojikutu to discuss the indoor mask mandate.

Dr. Ojikutu: As I mentioned at the top of my presentation, all our key metrics are moving in the right direction, including the metrics used to determine the status of City's B Together vaccination requirement: COVID-19 hospitalizations, ICU capacity, and community positivity rate.

However, we do not look at these metrics alone when considering our public health orders related to masking.

Many other factors need to be considered in any decision related to masking. We must look disparities in infection and vaccination rates to ensure we are not leaving behind vulnerable communities facing barriers to care and resources.

We must make sure those who are immunocompromised or who have other pre-existing conditions that increase their risk of COVID-19 are able to be safe and fully participate in our city's public life.

Timing also plays a role. Many families were traveling last week during school vacation, increasing the possibility of the spread of COVID-19. Masking is an important strategy to mitigate this risk as it will help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by those who may not yet be showing symptoms during the high points of transmissibility.

Masking offers a first line of defense when there is increased risk of COVID-19. It is critical that orders, guidance, and recommendation can be developed, implemented, and re-implemented quickly when needed. That means several data points that show an immediate picture must be considered.

Finally, we must always follow the best available data. As our understanding of this disease evolves, so does the way we track and measure its impact. Our response must evolve to always follow the best available data and science.

All these indications show continued improvement in the prevalence and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic in Boston at the present time. However, community transmission of COVID-19 is still happening in Boston, and it is important to prevent transmissions where possible and protect our vulnerable residents who remain at risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19 infections.

Recently released CDC guidance aligns with our observations about pandemic conditions in Boston.

Based on the data I've presented and the several factors I have discussed, and as Executive Director and agent of the Board of Health under the public health emergency declaration, I am prepared at this point to rescind the current order requiring face coverings in indoor public spaces effective, effective Saturday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

While mask wearing would no longer be mandated in indoor public settings, venues, gatherings, and businesses that interact with the public, the Boston Public Health Commission, and I, as a medical doctor specializing in infectious disease, recommend that we consider that there are many people who are vulnerable in our populations including individuals who are immunocompromised, the elderly and the unvaccinated, including young children. Therefore, we continue to recommend masking these settings if you are at high risk for severe illness or if you will be around individuals who are. This will minimize your own risk of infection and minimizes spread to others.

Do not let your guard down just yet—consider your specific situation and risk factors, and those in your life who may be vulnerable, before going without your mask.

I also want to be clear what ending the City of Boston's mask mandate would change and what it would not change.

Masking would no longer be required indoors on the premises of a business, or place of assembly or other place that is open to members of the public, including but not limited to retail establishments, restaurants, bars, performance venues, gyms and fitness centers, social clubs, event spaces, function rooms, ballrooms, and public spaces in municipal buildings.

In line with state and federal masking requirements, masks are still required on and in: public transportation including planes, trains, buses, ferries, taxis and ride-shares, and all other transportation; transportation hubs like airports, bus terminals, train stations, marinas, seaports or other ports, MBTA stations, or any other area that provides transportation; healthcare facilities; congregate care facilities or programs; emergency shelter programs; correctional facilities; many state Health Care and Day Services and Programs; and for home health care workers.

I want to be clear that businesses, organizations, and employers are free and welcome to require patrons, employees, clients, and anyone else in their establishment to wear a face covering.

Today's plan does not address the masking requirement in Boston Public Schools. The Boston Public Health Commission advises Boston Public Schools on matters of public health, including masking. However, the requirement that masks be worn in public schools is BPS policy and not issued as an emergency public health order.

We will continue to provide the Board and the public with updates about the information we are sharing to inform these decisions, but we will take some time later in the agenda for an update on BPS from Dr. Sanchez, our Bureau of Infectious Disease Medical Director, who has been working closely with BPS on their Covid-19 response.

As mentioned previously, based on the data I've presented and the several factors I have discussed, and as Executive Director and agent of the Board of Health under the public health emergency declaration, I am prepared at this point to rescind the current order requiring face coverings in indoor public spaces effective, effective March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

This plan to rescind has not been issued yet and given the importance of this issue, I welcome the advice and counsel of the Board on the course of action I've described, and am pleased to answer any questions Board members may have.

Lopes: I welcome any questions or discussion from the Board at this point.

Lopes: Do we think it will cause confusion in the city where schools and some institutions that still have mandates?

Dr. Ojikutu: Health Communication will be important. We plan to communicate the rationale after this meeting, and we look forward to sharing more information about schools later in this meeting and moving forward.

Valdez: What criteria do you imagine will need to be in place to further phase out masking requirements?

Dr. Ojikutu: We will have a more detailed discussion next week with more context for consideration as those decisions are made

Laptiste: Is there a threshold for reversing in the event we need to reinstate a face covering order again in the future?

Dr. Ojikutu: We are in the process for developing a plan for reinstating if necessary. We will be looking closely at metrics moving forward, including predictive metrics, like wastewater and case rates, and we will communicate what we see and any needed changes to the public and this Board.

Lopes: I have been advised that a vote of the Board is not required to rescind the face coverings order. However, I do think it would be useful for the Board to take a roll call vote in the form of a resolution to support rescinding the face coverings emergency order on the terms described today. Hearing no opposition, I will accept a motion.

A motion was made by Ms. Walsh, seconded by Mr. Fernandez, and a roll call vote was taken with Laptiste, Gutman, Fernandez, Walsh, Valdez, Childs-Roshak, Lopes all voting unanimously in support.

Dr. Ojikutu: Thank you for your input, advice and feedback on this recommendation.

Under the authority established under the Boston Public Health Act of 1995 as well as the Boston Public Health Commission's Declaration of a Public Health Emergency Relative to COVID-19 in the City of Boston, and in full consideration of the current public health data and the Board's feedback, I will now rescind the indoor masking as established on August 20, 2021, for the City of Boston, effective on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Dr. Childs-Roshak: Can you provide an update about symptom attestations, symptom logging for contact tracing in establishments?

Dr. Ojikutu: For follow up with cases, and what CDC is recommending, is that if individuals get a positive test, to rapidly let contacts know. Within organizations, we've developed strategies to make sure that people have the right information, and that they know what they need to know to isolate or quarantine. In our workplace, we promote the use of rapid testing to come off of isolation. Each institution is making their own decisions based on the risk and type of work they do, so there will be some differences in terms of institutions will proceed.

Lopes: Now I will ask Dr. Sanchez to give an update on BPS data.

Dr. Sanchez: Over the past months, BPHC's Infectious Diseases Bureau, including myself, our Communicable Disease Control Director, Julia Gunn, and our newly established BPHC Outbreak Response Team, have been collaborating closely with Boston Public Schools leadership to support their COVID-19 case response. I have also been advising on the development of their mitigation protocols and COVID-19 pediatric vaccination efforts. Today, I will be providing an overview of their case trends and recent COVID-19 related policies.

Cases within the BPS system among staff and students have continued to decrease in past weeks-down to 120 cases in the week before Winter Break from a peak of >1,000 cases in one week during January, mirroring trends observed across the City.

There are a few updates I'd like to share regarding recent and upcoming changes to testing, travel extracurricular, and visitor policies at BPS. With regard to COVID-19 testing, we have worked to increase access to COVID-19 testing for BPS families and staff. Rapid testing kits were administered to all students and staff across BPS before Winter Break.

Thus far, we have had few that reported positive cases and low rates of absenteeism this week. BPS is maintaining weekly COVID-19 screening testing that is offered to all students and staff; and starting next week, we will be distributing at-home rapid testing kits to students and staff for weekly use, in lieu of the test and stay program in school requiring daily contact tracing and testing in schools in the event of positive cases. This will allow us to continue rapidly identifying and isolating cases, while relieving burdens on teachers, school nurses, and school leaders. We are still in the process of expanding our reporting systems for these weekly at-home tests and communicating these policies to families and staff, which is critical to ensure timely reporting and responses.

Given declining rates of COVID-19 in schools and the community and the successful nature of our mitigation strategies, we have also been very excited to resume activities that really allow for our BPS students to be children and enjoy school, including: resuming high-risk extracurricular activities, such as athletics and performing arts; removing limitations on spectators for extracurricular events; resuming school field trips; and allowing in-state travel to school-sponsored competitions and events

We plan to monitor case rates closely in the following weeks as we implement these changes. Our priority is to protect students' return to activities. I want to note that masking and testing

remain critical mitigation strategies that we believe will support our ability to safely roll out these fun yet higher risk activities while avoiding clusters and cases resulting in lost school days, especially given low rates of pediatric vaccinations across the City, and as we monitor rates of COVID-19 in coming weeks.

Lopes: Thank you, Dr. Sanchez. Now I'll turn it over to General Counsel Batool Raza for an update on the Eviction Moratorium.

Raza: Last Friday on February 25, 2022, the BPHC issued a new order sunseting the eviction moratorium that which was issued on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021 and placed a temporary pause on landlords evicting tenants in the City of Boston. Under the new order, the eviction moratorium will now end on March 31, 2022.

I also want to share that we received a decision from the appeals court that found that a time-limited eviction moratorium was within BPHC's authority.

The order was designed to protect our City's most vulnerable residents who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and could face the possibility of becoming homeless in the middle of the pandemic. Given the continued improvement in the prevalence and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, BPHC has ordered an end to the moratorium. The reissued order is intended to provide tenants with enough time to prepare for a move to alternative housing accommodations if necessary and provide agencies that support tenants in locating alternative housing accommodations with an opportunity to prepare for this change. The City's Department of Neighborhood Development is working diligently with the City's tenants to support them through this process.

Lopes: Thank you General Counsel Raza. Thank you Dr. Ojikutu and BPHC staff for your leadership and thoughtful, data-driven approach to these important issues. The Board looks forward to providing ongoing feedback and support to BPHC's COVID-19 response.

Hearing no further questions from the Board, this meeting stands adjourned.

Attest:

/s/ PJ McCann

Board Secretary