

**KNOX COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING MINUTES**  
**December 30, 2020; from 5:00 PM to 6:55 PM**  
**Knox County Health Department**  
**Via Zoom Meeting**

**Present:**

Martha Buchanan, MD, Secretary  
Jack E. Gotcher, Jr., DDS, Chair  
Maria Hurt, DNP  
Glenn Jacobs, Knox County Mayor  
Patrick O'Brien, MD  
Ani Roma, Citizen Representative  
James Shamiyeh, MD  
Marcy Souza, DVM  
Lisa Wagoner, RN; representing Superintendent Bob Thomas, Knox County Schools

**Absent:** Dianna Drake, PharmD

**Others Attending:**

**KCHD:** Danielle Davis (Zoom Host), Kelsey Wilson, Michelle Moyers (recorder)  
**Knox County:** David Sanders, Esq. representing Knox County Law Department

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Dr. Gotcher called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM

**II. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM**

Dr. Gotcher requested Ms. Wilson take roll call to confirm establishment of the quorum. Nine Board members were in attendance and one member was absent. Quorum was met.

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM DEC. 16 MEETING**

Motion made by Dr. Souza and seconded by Ms. Roma to accept the minutes. The motion passed unanimously, via roll call vote, 9 to 0.

**IV. SET THE AGENDA**

Motion made by Dr. Buchanan and seconded by Dr. Souza to set the agenda. The motion passed unanimously, via roll call vote, 9 to 0.

**V. KNOX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT BENCHMARK PRESENTATION BY DR. BUCHANAN**

Dr. Buchanan reviewed the current local situation and the five benchmarks, available on the health department's website as follows:

- 129 new confirmed cases since yesterday's report.
- 4,901 are active cases, which is up significantly since the last board meeting.
- 177 Knox County residents are currently hospitalized.
- 3 additional deaths to report today, raising our total to 315.

Dr. Buchanan urged caution when reviewing the lower case count increases over the past few days. The lower counts are most likely a reflection of lower testing volumes over Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and over the weekend. She expects cases to increase as community members get tested this week and following New Year's Day holiday.

Dr. Buchanan shared an update on vaccine. KCHD is currently vaccinating those who fall within Phase 1a1 and Phase 1a2, as identified in the statewide plan. Additionally, KCHD will be vaccinating those 75 years and older. A clinic will be held Saturday, January 2 from 9 AM – 2 PM, or until vaccine supplies last. All of the details were sent out today in a news release and posted to the KCHD website. KCHD will schedule and announce additional clinics as they receive more vaccine. Dr. Buchanan shared that Phase1a1 includes in-patient health providers, first responders with direct exposure to the public and staff members and residents of long-term care facilities. Phase 1a2 includes those primarily working in outpatient health care settings. The full breakdown is available on the [KCHD website](#). Dr. Buchanan shared a graphic from TDH that visually outlines the vaccination allocation phases. She stated that TDH is tracking vaccine distribution and the TDH website is a good source for that information. KCHD can only speak to what vaccinations they administer.

**Benchmark 1: Sustained reduction or stability in new cases for 14 days/RED**

Over this time period, our case counts remain high, with an average of 391 cases per day. The data over this time period did not have consecutive red flags. However, we have seen a sustained high volume of cases which is not a place where we want our community. Because of this consistent high volume of daily increases, we are representing this benchmark as red.

**Benchmark 2: Community-wide sustained and increased diagnostic testing with consistent or decreased test result reporting turnaround time/RED**

Regarding testing, the total number of tests conducted has decreased since the last reporting time, but is consistent with weeks prior. The issue we are continuing to see is with lab turnaround time. Over this time period, we are continuing to see an average turnaround time of 6.5 days in our community. This week we have been seeing improved turnaround times and we expect the delay in receiving results to be lower next week. Because of these factors, we are representing this benchmark as red.

**Benchmark 3: Sustained or increased public health capability/RED**

Based on our internal assessment of our capabilities and acknowledging the need to prioritize our case investigations and contact tracing, we are representing this benchmark as red. We continue to use our resources in the best way we can, with the understanding that resources are not unlimited. We are consistently looking at ways to best accomplish this as the situation continues to evolve.

**Benchmark 4: Health care system capabilities remain with current and forecasted surge capacity/RED**

During this time period, flags were noted for positive inpatients, ICU patients and ventilated patients. Numbers remain very high with yesterday marking the greatest number of COVID-inpatients to date at 627. After speaking with our hospital partners, they have recommended that benchmark be represented as red.

**Benchmark 5: Sustained or decreased COVID-19 related death rate for identified positive or probable patients/RED**

Deaths have continued to increase in our community. During this time period, we have seen 58 deaths related to COVID-19. This is an average of about 4 deaths per day, which is up from three from our last meeting. This is not a direction that we want to continue down. This information leads us to represent this benchmark as red.

**Supplemental Data:**

**Chart 1: New COVID-19 Daily Cases per 100,000 Population**

This chart shows new daily COVID cases per 100,000 population. As of Tuesday (Dec. 29), our 14-day trendline shows 83 new cases per 100,000, and our seven-day trendline shows 60 new cases per 100,000—both of which are up from last week.

**Chart 2: COVID-19 Percent Positive Test**

This chart shows the percent positive for COVID-19. This data is received from the Tennessee Department of Health. The seven-day average for percent positive in Knox County is 20.8%. Both of these are above the metrics the Board adopted regarding for escalation as it relates to regulations.

Discussion from the board regarding Dr. Buchanan’s presentation focused on vaccination for long-term care facilities, continue vaccination rollout, and how Board members should respond to citizen inquiries regarding vaccine. Dr. Buchanan shared that KCHD will be assisting with vaccination at some smaller assisted living facilities and homes for developmentally and intellectually disabled. She shared that TDH is working with providers like CVS, Kroger, and Walgreens to provide a broader spectrum of access to the public. In terms of staying informed on the vaccine rollout, Dr. Buchanan recommended the TDH website and shared that KCHD will be updating their website on the groups that are eligible to receive the vaccine. KCHD will also be updating its social media platforms and sharing with local media outlets to keep the public informed on vaccination opportunities.

Dr. Shamiyeh noted that the additional surge capacity data point captures “space and stuff” but does not address staffing. He suggested adding an asterisk next to this data to offer that additional clarity.

**VI. UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE MEDICAL CENTER AT KNOXVILLE DATA UPDATE BY DR. SHAMIYEH**

Dr. Shamiyeh presented data from the University of Tennessee Medical Center and regional data on COVID hospitalization, see attached PowerPoint.

Dr. Shamiyeh shared that looking at new cases by week and by month over the district, this most recent week shows a lower bar. This suggests that we have had fewer cases, but testing amounts were down—meaning fewer people were being diagnosed. In terms of cases, December was a big month compared to any other month before for both Knox County (12,326 cases) and the district (29,114).

The THA Knoxville District Test Result Volume data shows a decrease in testing the week of the Christmas holidays. This testing decrease (“Big 4” Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Shelby Counties Comparison) was seen in other metros across the state.

Knox County New Cases Age Demographics is broken down by decade. Every decade saw the same impact from the past week’s decreased testing.

Knox County’s 7-day positivity rate is at 26.83%. Decreased testing will also drive up the positivity rate, but this is a very high positivity rate.

Hospitalizations by week/month—TDH reported hospitalizations continue to be delayed by days or week. Dr. Shamiyeh noted that the proportion of COVID patients in a hospital does impact capacity since they tend to stay longer.

THA Knoxville District Census—Dr. Shamiyeh noted that because of holiday reporting there were some gaps in the data. There was a drop in census but is now on the rise. The THA Knoxville District Projection Comparison shows a steady rise.

Discussion from the board regarding Dr. Shamiyeh's presentation centered around surge capacity and the ability to track data on critical status events.

**VII. QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (presentations sent previously)**

**University of Tennessee Knoxville/Knox County Schools (KCS)**

Dr. O'Brien noted that there was not much data to review since both UT and KCS are not in session. Ms. Wagoner shared that KCS staff will return on January 4 and students will return on January 5. Board discussion regarding the presentation focused on factors KCS considers before deciding to go virtual.

**VIII. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION**

**A. COVID-19 FACE COVERING REGULATION, NO. 2020-1**

No action was taken on this regulation. There was some discussion about the importance of community members to continue to follow the 5 Core Actions even if they are vaccinated.

**B. COVID-19 RESTAURANT OCCUPANCY LIMITATION AND EARLY CLOSURE REGULATION, NO. 2020-7**

This regulation is set to expire on January 6. Some preliminary discussion among Board members included transitioning Regulation 2020-7 to a recommendation as well as making some allowances for establishments to be open to serve first responders and public service workers. Dr. Buchanan mentioned that the rationale for putting this regulation into place was based on a study and in addition, this was recommended by the White House Task Force.

Motion made by Dr. Buchanan to extend the regulation to January 21, 2021 and seconded by Dr. Souza. The board voted 8-1 (confirmed by roll call) to continue the measure until January 21, 2021.

**C. COVID-19 SOCIAL GATHERING LIMITATION REGULATION, NO. 2020-8**

This regulation is set to expire on January 1. Motion made by Dr. Buchanan to extend Regulation 2020-8 to January 21, 2021 and seconded by Dr. Souza. Some board members encouraged the public to stay home for New Year's Eve. The motion passed, via roll call vote, 8-1.

**IX. DISCUSS AGENDA PLANNING MEETING BY DR. O'BRIEN**

Dr. O'Brien introduced this topic saying this came from discussion with several County Commissioners. The recommendation was made to Dr. O'Brien to have a brief meeting on the Monday morning (by Zoom) before the Board sets their meeting agenda. Dr. Buchanan asked that the Board wait to do this until some temporary staff are hired to assist with Board functions. Some members shared that their schedules would not permit a Monday morning meeting.

**X. DISCUSS THE POSSIBLE NEED FOR ASSISTANT PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER TO BE ADDED TO KCHD STAFF BY DR. O'BRIEN**

Dr. O'Brien introduced this topic. The Board requested that Dr. Buchanan provide her input on this topic. Dr. Buchanan shared that KCHD has reorganized in the last two years to support the work that KCHD performs in the community. In the past, she stated that Health Department Director has been appointed by the Knox County Mayor with no involvement from the Commissioner of Health. She offered that she did not see the need for this position but acknowledged that succession planning is important. Mr. Sanders provided some guidance on the state statutes regarding County Health Director/County Health Officer.

**XI. OTHER BUSINESS**

Board members had some discussion regarding the County Commission decision to change the BOH to an advisory board. Mr. Sanders provided some clarification on the ordinance and its potential impact. Discussion focused on how board members can best prepare for this potential change.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no other business, Dr. Souza moved to adjourn the meeting with a second by Dr. O'Brien. Meeting was adjourned at 6:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Martha Buchanan, MD, Senior Director and Public Health Officer  
Knox County Health Department  
Secretary, Knox County Board of Health

**List of Attachments:**

- COVID-19 Update-Dec. 30, 2020; PowerPoint Presentation by Dr. Shamiyeh
- Tennessee Department of Health COVID-19 Phases