

To: Board of Health

Date: January 2022 (reflects activity December 15, 2021 to date)

Re: Director's Report

COVID-19 Status and Response

Case Monitoring

Since the first case of the Omicron variant was detected in the U.S. on December 1, 2021 it has quickly become the dominant strain throughout the nation and has contributed to the rapid increases in local disease metrics in El Paso County.

On December 21, 2021 an El Paso County man in his 40s was the first identified case of the Omicron COVID-19 variant in the county. The individual, who is fully vaccinated and received his booster shot, reported mild symptoms during his illness and has since completed his isolation period. This individual reported a history of domestic travel during his exposure period.

The emergence of a new variant underscores the importance of practicing layered prevention. El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) continues to recommend that individuals get vaccinated, get their booster shots when eligible and use face coverings in public indoor spaces regardless of vaccination status, along with other prevention measures such as staying home when sick, limiting large gatherings and washing hands frequently.

COVID-19 data trends through Tuesday, January 18:

- **Seven-day incidence:** 1,597.7
- **Seven-day positivity:** 34.06%
- **Hospital admissions and deaths in the last seven days (January 11 - 18):** 122 and 0

For more comprehensive local data, see the [COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#).

Vaccination

December 14, 2021 marked one year since the COVID-19 vaccine became available to El Paso County residents. Since this date, the El Paso County and Colorado Springs Vaccine Consortium has expanded access to the vaccines to every corner of the county. A snapshot of these efforts includes:

- Vaccines brought to homebound individuals through Operation House Call
- The launch of mobile efforts with Nomi Health in April and El Paso County Public Health's own mobile outreach van in September 2021, meeting people where they are and offering convenient access at community events, workplaces, churches and schools
- Drive-thru mass vaccination sites, first at the Broadmoor World Arena and currently at Chapel Hills Mall and Citadel Mall
- Equity clinics, in partnership with community organizations to bring vaccines
- Multiple clinics at the new El Paso County Public Health South location in Fountain
- Leveraging the existing health care infrastructure at hospitals, pharmacies, clinics and doctors' offices to facilitate access to the vaccine
- Working with partners to reduce barriers and increase access through:

- Phone helpline through Pikes Peak United Way’s 2-1-1
- Free transportation to and from vaccine appointments through Envida, Silver Key Senior Services and Lyft
- Weekend and evening clinics to accommodate work and school schedules
- Language support for Spanish and American Sign Language

On January 5, 2022, the CDC endorsed the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices’ (ACIP) recommendations to expand eligibility of booster doses to children 12 to 15 years old. Additionally, CDC now recommends that children aged 12 to 17 years old should receive a booster shot five months after their initial Pfizer vaccination series.

Vaccine Data

Vaccine data through Tuesday, January 18, 2022, including federal estimates:

- **Total doses administered: 944,738**
 - 1,054,200 with federal estimates
- **People vaccinated: 420,364 (61.9%)**
 - 478,800 (71.5%) with federal estimates
- **People fully vaccinated: 376,272 (55.4%)**
 - 427,200 (63.8%) with federal estimates

As of Sunday, January 9, **50.2 percent of 12–17-year-olds and 20.7 percent of 5-11 year-olds** in El Paso County have been vaccinated (received at least one dose).

To access the latest vaccine numbers for El Paso County, see the [COVID-19 vaccine dashboard](#).

Children and Youth COVID-19 Data Brief

As of January 9, the 0-17 age group accounts for:

- 2,763 of 20,797 (13.3%) total cases in the last 30 days
- 25 of 398 (6.3%) total hospitalizations in the last 30 days
- 0 of 90 total deaths in the last 30 days.

On January 10, 2022 El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) updated the school and child care [guidance](#) to align with new guidance from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [CDC’s recommendations](#) were updated to facilitate individual social and well-being needs, return to work, and maintenance of critical infrastructure. [Schools](#) are an important part of the infrastructure of communities, providing safe and supportive learning environments to support physical, mental, social and emotional health and well-being of students.

Key takeaways from this updated guidance, effective Jan. 10, include:

- Modified isolation requirements, which are now updated to align with CDC and CDPHE shortened isolation period of five days
- Modified quarantine requirements and recommendations
- Modified who is exempt from quarantine recommendations

Ongoing COVID-19 Response Activities

Updated Guidance

El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) updated guidance to match new recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) regarding COVID-19 isolation and quarantine for the general population.

The updated guidance as of December 28, 2021 shortens the recommended time for isolation from 10 days for people with COVID-19 to five days, if asymptomatic on day five, followed by five days of wearing a mask when around others. The CDC stated that this change is based on science demonstrating that the majority of COVID-19 transmission occurs early in the course of illness, generally in one to two days prior to symptom onset and two to three days after.

CDC also updated the recommended quarantine period for individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19. CDC and CDPHE now recommend quarantine for five days followed by mask use for an additional five days for individuals who are unvaccinated or are eligible for a booster but have not received one yet, defined as six months from their second Pfizer or Moderna dose or two months after their Johnson & Johnson dose. Alternatively, if a five-day quarantine is not feasible, the recommendation is to wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days. Individuals who have received their booster shot do not need to quarantine following an exposure but should wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure. Regardless of vaccination status, CDC recommends testing on day five after exposure or immediately if symptoms develop.

In response to the increase in COVID-19 cases driven by the more transmissible Omicron variant, EPCPH divisions and programs have reduced in-person meetings and interactions and maximized virtual work. Doing so will help protect our workforce and the critical work of EPCPH.

Testing

As of Dec. 29, 2021, testing providers in El Paso County reported an average of 3,387 PCR tests daily over the prior seven days, an increase of 28 percent from the previous seven-day period.

Mako Medical continues to offer free COVID-19 testing for individuals at four community-based testing sites throughout the county. These drive-thru sites are available at the Citadel Mall, Chapel Hills Mall, El Paso County Public Health South in Fountain, and at the corner of Old Meridian Rd. and Chicago Ave. in Falcon. No insurance is required.

Treatment

The current supply of therapeutics is extremely limited throughout the state and the nation. For individuals who want to know if they qualify for one of the therapeutics, they are advised to talk with their doctor or health care provider. Additionally, for individuals who want to receive monoclonal antibody therapy, they can call the COVID-19 hotline at 1-877-CO VAX CO (1-

877-268-2926) for help making an appointment. Individuals can also find a list of upcoming available appointments at COMassVax.org, though appointments are very limited at present.

EPCPH continues to monitor this situation with CDPHE and will provide updates as they become available.

Continuity of Operations

Communications

- The Office of Communication managed television media inquiries pertaining to emerging issues including COVID-19 numbers and trends, the Omicron variant, vaccination clinics and progress, testing, and new quarantine and isolation guidance. The total estimated viewership for these television interviews is more than 131,000 and the estimated earned media value is more than \$28,000.
- The Office of Communication also managed several print media inquiries on similar topics, with the addition of several pieces underscoring the importance of partnerships in ongoing response efforts.
 - The Colorado Springs Business Journal (CSBJ) featured a year-in-review article by Director Wheelan, entitled [Partnerships key to Public Health success](#). In this in-depth article, Director Wheelan highlights the importance of partnerships in Public Health's success, both as it relates to COVID-19 as well as across broader community and public health issues. The article also features numerous recognitions and achievements for EPCPH throughout the past year across several areas including Regional Recovery Council, reaccreditation, and data and analytics. The article looks ahead to the innovative ways EPCPH will continue to meet the needs of our community and improve community health through partnerships and strategic initiatives.
 - CSBJ also featured an additional article from EPCPH entitled, [Partnerships key to battle against COVID-19](#). This in-depth article features interviews from Director Wheelan and Deputy Director Ryberg, who speak to the remarkable progress we have made as a community in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Wheelan and Ryberg also note the critical partnerships that have made these efforts possible, highlighting the incredible efforts of the El Paso County and Colorado Springs Vaccine Consortium and the infrastructure that EPCPH—along with partners—have created to meet the needs of a community-wide response.
- The agency's website www.elpasocountyhealth.org had 65,643 new visitors in December, with 177,057 unique pageviews.
 - The website continued to see high a volume of traffic in 2021, with a yearly total of 822,806 new users and 2,639,151 unique pageviews.
 - The most visited webpages included the COVID-19 data dashboard, COVID-19 testing information, how to get a COVID-19 vaccine, and the COVID-19 vaccine data dashboard.
- EPCPH continued to utilize social media and other platforms this year to increase external communication and public awareness on emerging topics. During the

course of 2021, EPCPH continued to steadily build and increase audiences on social media channels.

- Facebook: increased followers by 19.5 percent
- Twitter: increased followers by 6.5 percent
- Instagram: increased followers by 8.8 percent
- In addition to website, social media, and traditional media, EPCPH remained committed in 2021 to providing timely, relevant and credible information to the public, issuing nearly 100 [press releases](#) throughout the year. Press releases covered multiple topics, including critical COVID-19 response updates as well as general public health emerging issues.

Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR)

The EPR team was a part of the critical work to support the health and safety of Boulder County residents affected by the Marshall Fire at the end of December 2021.

EPR and the South Central Healthcare Coalition were specifically activated to assist a Boulder County nursing home evacuation to a sister facility in Colorado Springs. The EPR team provided cots and bedding from EPCPH's Alternate Care Center supply along with ADA equipment and collaborated with the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management (PPROEM) Hazmat team to transport the needed items. Our EPR team's assistance in response to the Boulder fire in the midst of ongoing COVID duties is an excellent demonstration of our ability to shift and be nimble in addressing emergent needs, both locally and in areas outside of the county.

Environmental Health (EH)

- The EH Schools team, in coordination with CDPHE, conducted 9 self-certification audits on the General Requirements and the Science Labs in December 2021 to begin the school year. The school Self-Certification Audits are based on the school's responses to the Self-certifications. This is a new process that was implemented in accordance with *the Rules and Regulations Governing Schools in the State of Colorado*. This self-certification process allows us to better assess lower risk functions of the schools that have not been reviewed before, such as sanitizers, disinfectants, hygiene, toileting assistance, pest control, animals in classrooms, health services, etc. This has proved to be a successful implementation of this process that will continue during the rest of the 2021-2022 school year. It is important to note that in addition to this process, our Schools program will continue to maintain our high-risk inspections as we did prior to the pandemic.
- The Retail Food Team completed the inspections required by the contractual agreement with CDPHE for waived Retail Food License Reimbursement. The agreement required that the 1,586 facilities (comprised of full-service restaurants and bars) that received waived license fees were each inspected twice in 2021. The inspections were completed through a combination of onsite routine inspections, re-inspections and remote phone calls to provide education and assistance on food safety and COVID-19 guidelines and requirements.
- The Retail Food Team successfully standardized an Environmental Health Specialist as well as signed off two new EHS staff to conduct Retail Food inspections independently. Standardization and sign offs of staff are key to ensuring the RFE Program conducts inspections with consistency across inspectors.

Radon Home Testing

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, and El Paso County has been designated as an area with [high radon potential](#), according to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) encourages residents to take action this January during National Radon Action Month by testing homes for radon.

Test kits are generally inexpensive to purchase, and discounted kits are available. To find a testing kit, we have advised the public to visit cdphe.colorado.gov/testing-your-home-radon.

EH COVID-19 Activity

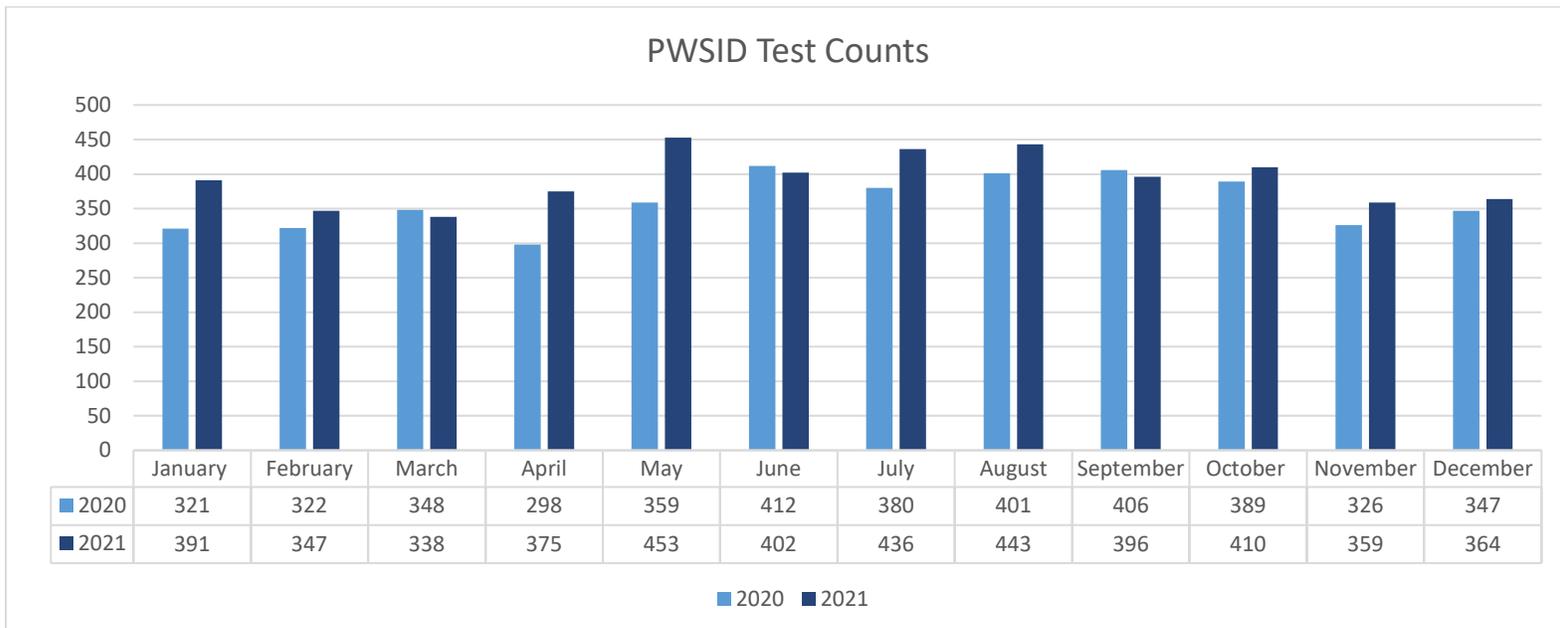
Environmental Health saw an increase in inquiries from healthcare facilities and retail sales. The increase in inquiries from these sectors were mainly due to the Omicron variant and the public inquiring about new guidelines regarding masks, vaccines, capacity, and social distancing.

Other EH Activities

Environment Health Activity	2021 Total	2020 Total
Air Quality Construction Permits	129	109
Air Quality Open Burn Permits	15	16
Air Quality Complaints	50	29
Animal Bites Reported	1385	1397
Body Art Inspections	85	74
Body Art Follow-up Inspections	6	0
Body Art Complaints	21	13
Child Care Regular Inspections	214	91
Child Care Follow-up Inspections	0	0
Child Care Complaints	4	1
Land-Use Planning Review	162	166
OWTS Pumper Truck Inspections	72	88
OWTS Final Inspections	516	512
OWTS Partial Inspections	170	71
OWTS Application Design Reviews	703	687
OWTS Design Revision Requests	272	132
OWTS New Permit Applications	387	330
OWTS Repair Permit Applications	282	267
OWTS Modification Permit Applications	11	19
OWTS Acceptance Doc for Title Transfer	1048	1009
OWTS Soil and Site Evaluations	518	464

Environment Health Activity	2021 Total	2020 Total
OWTS Complaints	29	31
OWTS O&M Systems	179	131
Recreational Water Safety Inspections	320	230
Recreational Water Follow-up Inspections	28	5
Recreational Water Complaints	13	3
RFE Regular Inspections	2960	846
RFE Re-Inspections	119	28
RFE Complaint Investigations	323	226
RFE Plan Reviews	153	142
School Safety Regular Inspections	0	5
School Safety Complaints	6	4
School Safety Self-Certification Audits	9	0
School Safety Self-Certifications Returned	295	0
Waste Tires Facilities Regular Inspections	117	30
Waste Tires Follow-up Inspections	5	0

Laboratory: Public Water System Tests conducted



Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program

The WIC caseload for December was 11,933. The program served a total of 21,249 participants during 2021. Due to federal congressional action, the increased fruit and vegetable benefit is extended through March 2022. A considerable amount of staff time was dedicated to re-issuing food packages.

During December, WIC staff completed 393 client PHQ2 behavioral health screenings, an increase of 32 from November. Staff completed 11 referrals to Diversus Health and 7 referrals to CCHA for further evaluation and resources to meet clients' specific behavioral health needs.

WIC staff continue to partner with multiple organizations such as CPCD HeadStart, SafeCare, Fort Carson Public Health Nurses, and Pikes Peak Library District to provide appropriate community resources and assistance for clients.

Staff continued the use of video services to address barriers to care. Lactation Management Specialists (LMS) provided appointments via Teams to assist patients during latch appointments. WIC continued to offer virtual breastfeeding classes while in-person group classes are suspended. WIC registered dietitians continue to provide a limited number of in-person appointments for high-risk clients. These mainly included latch appointments for mothers struggling to adapt to the use of technology and/or who were about to stop breastfeeding without enhanced support. In 2021, 510 clients completed the breastfeeding class. Fifty-three clients completed the Spanish-speaking class, which constituted over 300% increase from 2020. In addition, WIC conducted the first Annual Lactation Networking and Sharing Collaborative with various providers in Colorado Springs. This meeting helped various providers to facilitate continuity of care for mutual clients.

Family Planning

Family Planning continues to provide services five days per week to persons who are uninsured, underinsured in our community, and coordinate care with other service organizations on behalf of clients.

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)

Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) nurses conducted 158 telehealth visits during December. EPCPH NFP enrolled 6 new clients to the program and graduated 2 clients who had participated in the NFP program for a full 2 ½ years.

Nurse-Family Partnership recently expanded the use of language interpretation services to meet the needs of clients who do not speak English. We are actively seeking a Spanish-speaking nurse to add to our team to further enhance our community reach.

Immunization Program

The Immunization Program continued to prioritize COVID-19 vaccinations during December 2021. Several vaccine clinics were held by the EPCPH mobile van team including clinics at the EPCPH South building and other community locations. The Immunization Program supported other vaccine activities such as Operation House Call, long-term care facilities, and Colorado Springs Fire Department's efforts to vaccinate individuals experiencing homelessness. The program manager and assistant program manager continue to work to fill several open nurse and

support positions. The Immunization Program continued to serve refugees seeking vaccination and offered limited clinic appointments for routine vaccines, including flu vaccines.

Vital Records

The Vital Records Office scored 100% on their application audit and scored perfectly on all four of their quarterly security paper audits in 2021. The latter accounts for 69,941 total pieces of Banknote security paper issued from their office. They also calculated their birth and death certificate totals for the year; in 2021, they issued 21,859 birth certificates (more than any previous year) and 48,587 death certificates. They also assisted ten families with the process of home birth registrations for newborn babies, and assisted four families with the process of acting as individual Funeral Directors and completing the requirements for burial on private land.

Workforce Development

Resilience Health Coaching

EPCPH has partnered with the Lydia Hill Institute for Human Resilience at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, to offer Resilience Health Coaching at no cost to all employees and their families. Confidential coaching sessions are provided on a one-on-one basis and can help staff to process the ongoing pandemic experience more effectively and provide tools to become more resilient.

Diversus Health/Colorado Spirit is offering a supportive and resourceful ‘meet-up’ designed specifically for staff who are taking on COVID-19 response. Titled “Dear COVID”, the webinar series is held the third Thursday of every month and offers a unique approach to mental health webinars. EPCPH staff are encouraged to attend these webinars.

Board of Health Email Inquiries

The Board of Health email (boardofhealth@elpasoco.com) received 74 unique emails during the month of December 2021. The majority of the email inquiries were in opposition of the December 15, 2021 resolution (21 emails) as well as opposition to vaccine mandates (18 emails). The request to comment during the December 15 Board of Health meeting received 14 emails. The final majority topic included 14 emails in support of the December 15 resolution.

Board of Health December Emails by Topic

