

**To:** Board of Health  
**From:** Susan Wheelan, M.B.A., Public Health Director  
**Date:** August 2021 (reflects activity July 25, 2021 to date)  
**Re:** Director's Report

### **COVID-19 Status and Response**

Public Health's epidemiologists continue to closely monitor local, state and national data and trends, along with current literature on COVID-19. As the situation and the science evolves, we continue to use data for informed decision-making.

After a period of steady decline from May to early July, our local disease transmission rates have increased. During the last week of July, our positivity rate surpassed five percent and our incidence exceeded 100.

COVID-19 data trends through Sunday, August 15:

- **Seven-day incidence:** 162.5
- **Seven-day positivity:** 6.66%
- **Hospital admissions and deaths in the last seven days (August 8 – 15):** 51 and 7

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

The Delta variant is the most transmissible variant of concern yet, spreading more easily than both the original virus and the Alpha variant first identified in Britain. It is now the dominant strain of COVID-19 in El Paso County, the state of Colorado and across the country. The Delta variant spreads most easily in areas where there are large numbers of unvaccinated individuals. The Public Health team, El Paso County and Colorado Springs Vaccine Consortium and various community partners remain focused on efforts to reduce disease transmission in our community and the promotion of prevention measures including vaccination, which is the leading strategy to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

### **Vaccination**

As of August 15, (including federal estimates) 64.4 percent of El Paso County residents 12 and older are vaccinated with at least one dose and 57.8 percent are fully vaccinated. Vaccine providers continue to administer approximately 6,000 doses per week to residents, compared to our peak delivery of about 38,000 doses in early April. Although vaccination rates have declined during recent months, we are beginning to see the early signs of an increase.

### **Vaccine Data**

Vaccine data through Sunday, August 15, including federal estimates:

- **Total doses administered:** 631,685
  - 730,900 with federal estimates
- **People vaccinated:** 338,953 (55.6%)
  - 392,600 (64.4%) with federal estimates
- **People fully vaccinated:** 306,787 (50.3%)
  - 352,400 (57.8%) with federal estimates

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

### **Vaccine Access**

The Public Health South building has served as a valuable asset in our efforts to enhance access to the vaccine. Numerous compliments and positive feedback have been expressed by community members about the vaccine point of dispensing (POD) at the site -- some individuals have taken the time to send handwritten notes thanking our team for their professionalism, positive attitudes, and efficiency.

The volume of vaccine PODs both at the Public Health South site and across the community have decreased over the past several weeks due to less demand, but we are working on getting movement within the community to increase awareness and education on the vaccine and connecting with community partners to gauge their interest in hosting vaccine events or including in their existing events our mobile vaccination vans which were recently acquired to help expand access to the vaccine across the community.

### **Ongoing COVID-19 Response Activities**

#### **Updated CDC Guidance**

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its mask guidance to recommend fully vaccinated people wear masks indoors when in areas/counties with [substantial and high level of COVID-19 transmission](#), defined as any county with a seven-day incidence rate greater than 50 cases per 100,000 residents. This includes nearly two-thirds of all U.S. counties, including El Paso County. CDC's updated guidance can be found here: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html).

#### **Schools**

As of August 10, Public Health provides a weekly data brief to schools and community partners. This brief includes hyper-local data focused on youth and children age 17 and younger. The weekly brief is intended to provide local data, trends and context regarding COVID-19 and how it is impacting children and youth in our communities. These briefs can be found at [www.elpasocountyhealth.org/weekly-covid-19-children-and-youth-data-briefs](http://www.elpasocountyhealth.org/weekly-covid-19-children-and-youth-data-briefs)

#### **Communication**

- The Office of Communication managed television media inquiries pertaining to emerging issues including COVID-19 incidence, data and trends, COVID-19 vaccination efforts and progress, Delta variant, and overdose deaths. The total estimated viewership for these television interviews is nearly 259,000 and the estimated earned media value is more than \$49,000.
- The Office of Communication also managed several print media inquiries on similar topics, in addition to the topics of local youth suicide data and prevention efforts, COVID-19 outbreaks, and West Nile Virus in response to the first human cases of this disease detected in Colorado this season.
- In July, the Office of Communication created and disseminated a [toolkit promoting back-to-school vaccinations](#), including both routine childhood immunizations as well as the COVID-19 vaccine for those who are 12 and older. The toolkit, which contains social

media posts, content and graphics in both English and Spanish, was distributed widely to school and community partners.

- As part of continuous efforts to keep the community informed on emerging topics, the Office of Communication created a [webpage on the Delta variant](#).
- The Office of Communication promoted the kick-off of the 2021 Backpack Bash event, where Public Health immunization nurses provided free back-to-school vaccines on July 31 at Sierra High School. The event, hosted in partnership by COSILoveYou and Pikes Peak United Way, is part of a citywide effort to provide school supplies to 10,000 students in the Colorado Springs area.
- The agency's website [www.elpasocountyhealth.org](http://www.elpasocountyhealth.org) had 40,843 new visitors in July, with 124,756 unique pageviews.

### **Health Equity**

As mentioned above, the Immunizations team worked with COSIloveyou and Harrison School District to provide back-to-school immunizations at Sierra High School on July 31 at the Backpack Bash event, which is one in a series of community events in which Public Health participates to support equity and outreach efforts. Many children fell behind on their routine vaccination schedules during COVID-19, and our team worked to bring them up-to-date to protect them from vaccine-preventable diseases. The COVID-19 vaccine was also offered at this community event.

### **Continuity of Operations Plans**

El Paso County Public Health is pausing its planned return to office plan due to the Delta variant and increase in COVID-19 cases. Staff and programs who provide essential services and have been working in the building will continue to do so, and no programs will close to the public.

If staff can telework, they are encouraged to do so. Public Health leadership will reevaluate the situation at the end of August.

### **Environmental Health (EH)**

Beginning July 26, 2021, the revised Body Art Competency Exam went into effect. The exam was revised to better reflect the day-to-day processes of the body artists. While the exam is still based on Public Health regulations, it was revised in response to feedback from the industry and now includes more industry standard language.

On July 30, El Paso County Public Health issued guidance to residents to keep pets up-to-date on rabies vaccination and to avoid wild animals after a bat found in the Turkey Creek Canyon /Red Valley Estates neighborhood near Fort Carson tested positive for rabies.

The Retail Food Program Manager signed off three Environmental Health Specialists for completing their onboarding of conducting Retail Food inspections. The addition of these staff increases Environmental Health's ability to conduct more Retail Food inspections to provide education and protect the health of the community.

The Retail Food Program Manager participated in a statewide meeting for the creation of an Environmental Health Strike Team. The purpose of this strike team is to create cooperative

agreements between Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) and partners across disciplines and jurisdictions to build core capabilities and explore innovative approaches to response. This is a great opportunity for Colorado to take environmental health’s role to the next level of public health response and strengthen Colorado and community level resiliency.

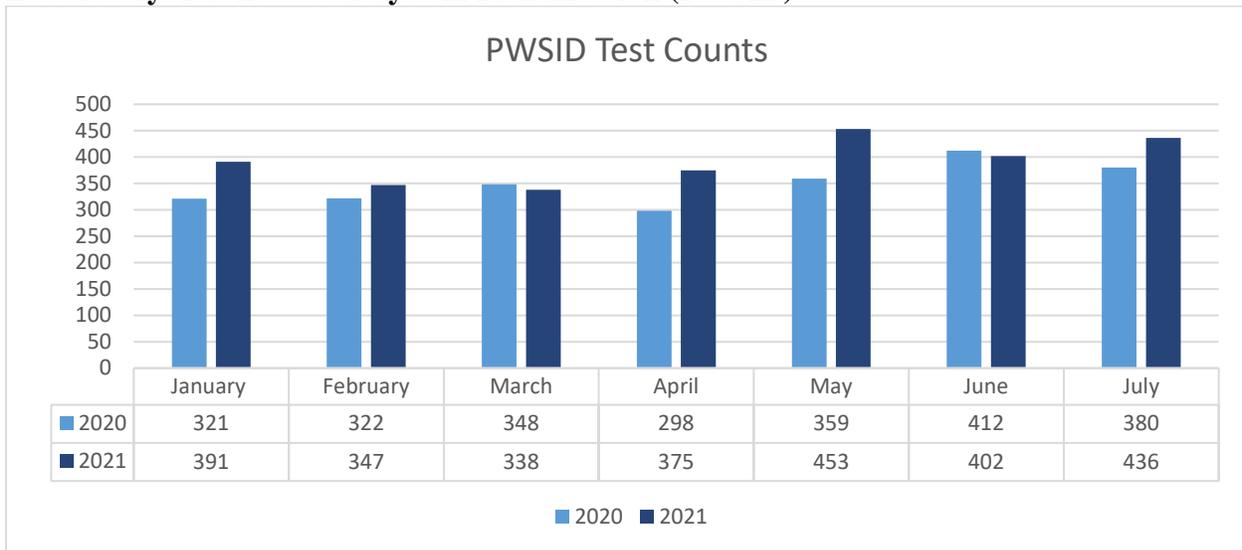
The Retail Food Program Manager participated in a Pikes Peak Regional Department (PPRBD) Coordination Meeting regarding the new USAFA Hotel and Event Center project in Colorado Springs. This meeting was led by the contractors of the project and was attended by the following community partners: Colorado Springs Economic Development, PPRBD Staff, Colorado Springs Fire Department, and El Paso County Public Health. This coordination allowed for a streamlined plan review process for a large project that will impact the community.

**Other EH Activities**

<b>Environment Health Activity</b>	<b>21 Total as of 7.31.2021</b>	<b>2020 Total</b>
<b>Air Quality Construction Permits</b>	92	109
<b>Air Quality Open Burn Permits</b>	15	16
<b>Air Quality Complaints</b>	30	29
<b>Animal Bites Reported</b>	857	1397
<b>Body Art Inspections</b>	47	74
<b>Body Art Follow-up Inspections</b>	4	0
<b>Body Art Complaints</b>	13	13
<b>Child Care Regular Inspections</b>	151	91
<b>Child Care Follow-up Inspections</b>	0	0
<b>Child Care Complaints</b>	1	1
<b>Land-Use Planning Review</b>	111	166
<b>OWTS Pumper Truck Inspections</b>	37	88
<b>OWTS Final Inspections</b>	341	512
<b>OWTS Partial Inspections</b>	77	71
<b>OWTS Application Design Reviews</b>	542	687
<b>OWTS Design Revision Requests</b>	171	132
<b>OWTS New Permit Applications</b>	229	330
<b>OWTS Repair Permit Applications</b>	194	267
<b>OWTS Modification Permit Applications</b>	5	19
<b>OWTS Acceptance Doc for Title Transfer</b>	654	1009
<b>OWTS Soil and Site Evaluations</b>	263	464
<b>OWTS Complaints</b>	12	31
<b>OWTS O&amp;M Systems</b>	103	131

Environment Health Activity	21 Total as of 7.31.2021	2020 Total
<b>Recreational Water Safety Inspections</b>	215	230
<b>Recreational Water Follow-up Inspections</b>	23	5
<b>Recreational Water Complaints</b>	6	3
<b>RFE Regular Inspections</b>	1551	846
<b>RFE Re-Inspections</b>	38	28
<b>RFE Complaint Investigations</b>	176	226
<b>RFE Plan Reviews</b>	89	142
<b>School Safety Regular Inspections</b>	0	5
<b>School Safety Complaints</b>	3	4
<b>Waste Tires Facilities Regular Inspections</b>	76	30
<b>Waste Tires Follow-up Inspections</b>	3	0

**Laboratory: Public Water System Identification (PWSID)**



**Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program**

The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) caseload for July was 12,539. To continue services while maintaining necessary social distancing, WIC educators continued phone appointments. The clinic remained open and available to clients for new benefit cards and breast pump issuance and returns. WIC continues to the practice of making follow-up calls for new certifications with the goal of increasing customer service and satisfaction.

WIC works with pregnant and post-partum women to identify depression, refer for behavioral health treatment, and reduce the stigma of seeking behavioral health services. During July, WIC

staff completed 480 Patient Health Questionnaires (PHQ2) behavioral health screenings. Staff completed 17 referrals to Diversus Health and 2 referrals to CCHA for further evaluation and connection to meet their specific behavioral health needs.

WIC continues to utilize an internal referral form for client-facing services throughout Public Health. During July, 32 referrals were made to and from WIC, NFP, HCP, and Family Planning.

WIC staff continued to participate in workgroups such as the Pikes Peak Breastfeeding Coalition, 0-3 Community Group Meeting, and the Prenatal Network. WIC staff continue to partner with organizations such as CPCD HeadStart and SafeCare to provide appropriate community referrals and assistance for clients. WIC continued participating in the Pikes Peak Library District prenatal classes to share information about WIC and breastfeeding services with the community, and staff have begun to attend the newly formed Colorado Black Breastfeeding Coalition meetings.

Coinciding with World Breastfeeding & National WIC Breastfeeding Week in early August, our WIC team along with two other WIC programs in the State were honored with the CO State Health Department's 2021 Breastfeeding Award of Excellence. Here is a quote from the State award committee:

*"This World Breastfeeding Week we congratulate the Mountain Plains Region 2021 Breastfeeding Awards of Excellence winners and celebrate the innovation, determination, and compassion the Region's WIC agencies demonstrate every day."*

### **Immunization Program**

The Immunization Program continues to work to resume pre-COVID clinic operations. The clinic is now open 5 days per week, vaccinating children, adults and international travelers. The clinic is focusing on the vaccination of clients who may be behind on routine vaccines during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The program is also supporting the Operation House Call team and local long-term care facilities by providing COVID vaccine to reach those who are homebound and residents and staff in nursing homes.

### **Family Planning**

Family Planning continues to collaborate with the Southern Colorado Health Network (SCHN) to coordinate care for diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Family Planning will receive additional funding from CDPHE September through December 2021 to hire a part-time physician to provide community education to other medical providers regarding reducing the rate of STIs in our county.

Family Planning is finishing the streamlining of the billing process to ensure insurance claims are billed properly and payment is received in a timely manner. Additionally, Family Planning will receive more funding to cover the cost of testing and treatment to serve the community.

Family Planning reopened the clinic five days per week to see patients in-person, as well as conducted telehealth visits when appropriate to serve as many clients as safely possible. Family Planning has reinstated its Information and Education Advisory Committee, consisting of a diverse group of individuals that will review Family Planning information and education

materials, as well as advise the program on community outreach opportunities and projects to pursue.

### **Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)**

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) nurses conducted 244 visits during July. Of these, 166 visits were held via telehealth and 78 visits were conducted in-person. NFP graduated 4 clients and enrolled 14 new clients to the program. Meeting clients through telehealth and video conferencing has helped continue client engagement as well as meet the needs of the most at risk by helping to remove barriers to health care. NFP nurses have started to meet with clients in-person on more regular basis. We will continue to monitor the incidence rate of COVID-19 as we plan for ongoing in-person visits.

### **Grant Updates**

Department of Health and Human Services *Promoting Vaccine Confidence in Local Communities through Partnerships with Regional Health Offices* funding application was submitted on August 17. The grant opportunity would extend for 3 years. If awarded this grant, Public Health plans to focus on the measles vaccination rate in school-aged children. This Public Health 3.0 approach focuses on new initiatives that address upstream vaccine confidence through cross-sector partnerships between public health, schools/social sector, and medical care. The overarching goal is to increase MMR immunization rates in school districts that currently have MMR vaccination rates below the County's rate of 86.82 percent (2019-2020) MMR fully immunized.