

**To:** Board of Health  
**From:** Susan Wheelan, M.B.A., Public Health Director  
**Date:** September 2021 (reflects activity August 25 to September 14)  
**Re:** Director's Report

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

After a period of sustained increase in August, local disease transmission decreased in early September; however, this decrease was short-lived, with El Paso County's seven-day incidence at 303.5 and the test positivity at 9.22 percent as of September 14. Test positivity is now approaching the peak of the year, which was previously recorded at 9.58 percent on January 2, 2021.

Given these rapidly fluctuating trends, we continue to be as proactive and nimble as possible in modifying mitigation strategies to support our schools, businesses, and other community organizations to help minimize local disease transmission and protect the health and safety of our residents.

The COVID-19 vaccines continue to be our leading prevention strategy. As the vaccination data below indicates, there is much work to be done to increase vaccination rates to achieve higher levels of community protection and reduce disease spread, severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths. With this goal, Public Health continues to convene the El Paso County and Colorado Springs Vaccine Consortium to deploy a multi-pronged strategy to ensure widespread access to vaccines across El Paso County and serve people where they are.

### **Vaccination Trends and Data**

As of September 14, 67.8 percent of El Paso County residents 12 and older (including federal estimates) are vaccinated with at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 60.9 percent are fully vaccinated. Vaccine providers are currently administering approximately 9,000 doses per week to residents. In August, providers administered approximately 6,000 doses per week, so we are seeing a reversal in the downward trend in vaccination rates, at present.

Vaccine data through Tuesday, September 14, including federal estimates:

- **Total doses administered: 670,877**
  - 775,500 with federal estimates
- **People vaccinated: 355,694 (58.4%)**
  - 412,900 (67.8%) with federal estimates
- **People fully vaccinated: 323,598 (53.1%)**
  - 371,000 (60.9%) with federal estimates

As of Tuesday, September 14, **43.6 percent of 12–17-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](#).

## **Vaccine Access**

- Currently, there are close to 30 COVID-19 vaccine providers and more than 100 convenient vaccine locations in the county. Many providers offer flexible clinic hours, including walk-ins and same-day appointments. Individuals can access an interactive [map](#) on our website to find the nearest provider and contact information to make an appointment or pre-register.
- We are expanding our mobile vaccination program to support on-site vaccination opportunities at schools, workplaces, houses of worship and community events. Organizations are encouraged to contact us to request a mobile vaccine unit at their locations by emailing [healthinfo@elpasoco.com](mailto:healthinfo@elpasoco.com).
- Transportation options remain available for anyone traveling to a vaccine appointment. Cost-free transportation is currently offered through Envida (for all residents), Silver Key (for seniors) and through Pikes Peak United Way's 2-1-1 for Lyft vouchers (for all residents).
- We continue to coordinate outreach to long-term care facilities to assist in vaccinating their residents and staff.

In addition to the activities above, our team is focused on the following planning efforts:

- Plan to provide third “booster” doses in the community in anticipation of Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) this fall
- Plan to vaccinate children age 5-11 when granted EUA
- Promotion and provision of flu vaccination in conjunction with COVID vaccination
- Coordination with hospitals, schools, and congregate facilities in preparation for respiratory illness season, which is expected to be busier than in prior years, concurrent with COVID-19 activity

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

### **Schools**

Outbreak trends in the K-12 school setting continue to be monitored by our Epidemiology team. Of note, the definition of an outbreak changed in June 2021 from two or more confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 to five or more confirmed or probable cases within a 14-day period. Even with this change, we are seeing an increase in outbreaks in terms of both number and size. When looking at the outbreak comparisons of last year and this year, it is important to note that each school year with COVID-19 carries its own unique complexities and factors to take into consideration. The environment last year looked different, with schools delaying openings and staggering them, which may have helped reduce the initial spread of disease. Another contributing factor this year is the presence of the Delta variant of the virus, which is more contagious and spreads more easily. It is still early in the school year, and Public Health will continue to monitor the data as it relates to cases and outbreaks and share timely information on trends.

As of September 14, the 0-17 age group accounts for:

- 1,963 of 7,816 total cases in the last 30 days
- 20 of 329 total hospitalizations in the last 30 days
- 1 of 41 total deaths in the last 30 days.

In support of ongoing efforts to combat COVID-19 and assist in the mitigation of virus spread, Governor Jared Polis directed the distribution of KN95 respirators and surgical masks at no cost to school districts, BOCES, charter schools, private schools and other facilities for staff and students. Shipments resumed on August 19 and will continue as needed. The link to request masks is available [online](#).

### **Communications**

- The Office of Communication managed television media inquiries pertaining to emerging issues including COVID-19 incidence, data, trends and outbreaks, COVID-19 vaccination efforts and progress, the Delta variant, and back-to-school COVID-19 trends. The total estimated viewership for these television interviews is more than 157,000 and the estimated earned media value is more than \$35,000.
- The Office of Communication also managed several print media inquiries on related topics.
- As part of ongoing efforts to keep the community informed on emerging topics, the Office of Communication worked in partnership with Public Health's Schools Team, Communicable Disease, Data and Analytics, and Leadership Team to create a weekly data brief focused on the impacts of COVID-19 on children and youth. With the return to in-person learning, this brief provides local data, trends and context to help keep community partners informed and provide situational awareness. The data briefs can be found on the [Public Health website](#).
- El Paso County Public Health has established a [repository](#) of recent research articles from credible sources. This new resource will be updated weekly as articles are compiled and published.
- In one of several activities to raise awareness around suicide prevention efforts during the month of September, National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, the El Paso County Board of Health (BOH) and the El Paso County Board of Commissioners (BOCC) issued proclamations recognizing September as El Paso County Suicide Prevention Awareness Month during their August meetings on Aug. 25 and Aug. 31, respectively.
  - The BOH proclamation can be found [here](#)
  - The BOCC proclamation can be found [here](#)
- Public Health's website [www.elpasocountyhealth.org](http://www.elpasocountyhealth.org) had 62,752 new visitors in August, with 202,480 unique pageviews.

### **Continuity of Operations**

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

- The On-Site Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS) Team continues to see a significant increase in applications for new construction. There has also been an increase in design revision requests and additional inspections.
- The OWTS staff has effected a five-business day average turnaround on most permit issuance. This is a significant decrease from previous 3-5 week turnarounds.
- The OWTS Team continues to send bi-monthly email communication to all industry partners in lieu of in-person quarterly meetings. All updates are posted on the website for community and industry partners to view.

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) released the annual application for the Radon Grant. Public Health applied for this funding opportunity which will be managed by the Air Quality Program Manager if the grant is awarded.
- The Retail Food Program Manager attended the Conference for Food Protection on August 16 – 20. This bi-annual meeting includes a formal process whereby members of industry, regulatory, academia, consumer, and professional organizations have the opportunity to provide input on the development and/or modification of food safety guidance. Such guidance is incorporated into food safety laws and regulations at all levels of government throughout the United States.

**Emerging Topics/Questions from the Community**

Environmental Health saw a decrease in all inquiries received and addressed by Environmental Health staff during August. Guidance requests greatly outnumbered complaints. 43 of the 50 total inquiries pertained to Public Health Order (PHO) guidance, compliance issues, and questions regarding mask usage.

Top industries with Environmental Health inquiries for August 2021:

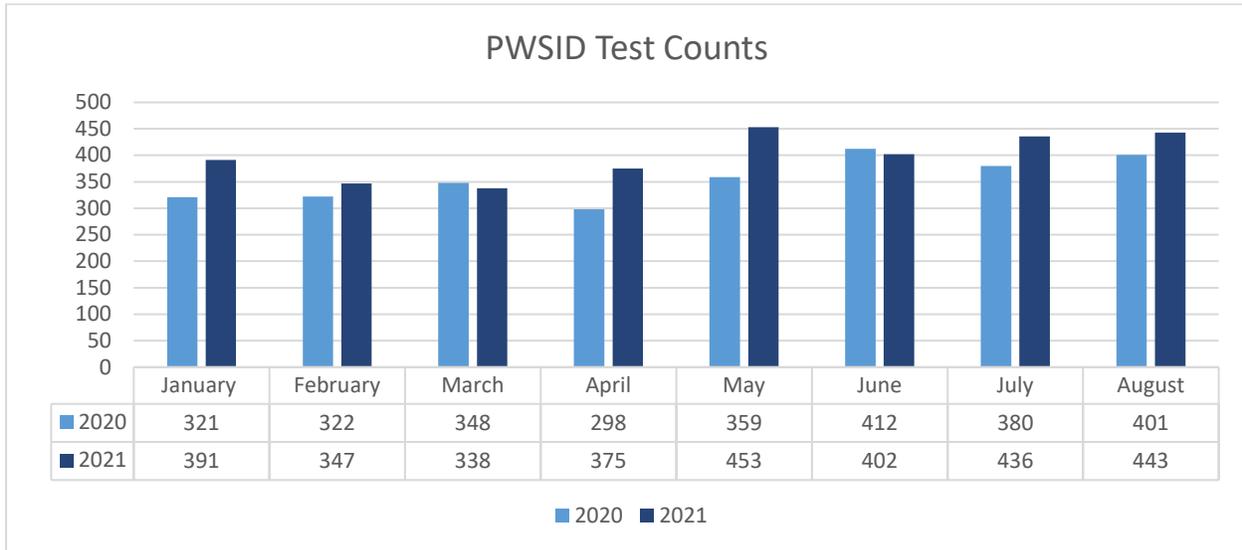
- Retail Food Establishments (RFE) continues to trend as #1 with 42% (21 total)
- Personal Services 18% (9 total)
- Slight increase in the following with 6% (3 total each)
  - Event/Social Gathering
  - Healthcare
  - Other
  - Testing Site Questions

**Other EH Activities**

<b>Environment Health Activity</b>	<b>2021 Total as of 8.31.21</b>	<b>2020 Total</b>
<b>Air Quality Construction Permits</b>	101	109
<b>Air Quality Open Burn Permits</b>	15	16
<b>Air Quality Complaints</b>	37	29
<b>Animal Bites Reported</b>	1001	1397
<b>Body Art Inspections</b>	58	74
<b>Body Art Follow-up Inspections</b>	4	0
<b>Body Art Complaints</b>	14	13
<b>Child Care Regular Inspections</b>	159	91
<b>Child Care Follow-up Inspections</b>	0	0
<b>Child Care Complaints</b>	2	1
<b>Land-Use Planning Review</b>	131	166
<b>OWTS Pumper Truck Inspections</b>	46	88

<b>Environment Health Activity</b>	<b>2021 Total as of 8.31.21</b>	<b>2020 Total</b>
<b>OWTS Final Inspections</b>	376	512
<b>OWTS Partial Inspections</b>	89	71
<b>OWTS Application Design Reviews</b>	542	687
<b>OWTS Design Revision Requests</b>	205	132
<b>OWTS New Permit Applications</b>	270	330
<b>OWTS Repair Permit Applications</b>	22	267
<b>OWTS Modification Permit Applications</b>	7	19
<b>OWTS Acceptance Doc for Title Transfer</b>	759	1009
<b>OWTS Soil and Site Evaluations</b>	319	464
<b>OWTS Complaints</b>	19	31
<b>OWTS O&amp;M Systems</b>	113	131
<b>Recreational Water Safety Inspections</b>	224	230
<b>Recreational Water Follow-up Inspections</b>	24	5
<b>Recreational Water Complaints</b>	6	3
<b>RFE Regular Inspections</b>	1741	846
<b>RFE Re-Inspections</b>	58	28
<b>RFE Complaint Investigations</b>	227	226
<b>RFE Plan Reviews</b>	108	142
<b>School Safety Regular Inspections</b>	0	5
<b>School Safety Complaints</b>	3	4
<b>Waste Tires Facilities Regular Inspections</b>	91	30
<b>Waste Tires Follow-up Inspections</b>	3	0

## Laboratory: Public Water System Tests conducted



## Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program

The WIC caseload for August was 12,489. Despite staffing shortages, WIC staff continued to provide exceptional customer service to clients. 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 make follow-up calls for new certifications with the goal of increasing customer service and satisfaction.

WIC staff work with pregnant and post-partum women to identify depression, refer for behavioral health treatment, and reduce the stigma of seeking behavioral health services. During August, WIC completed 458 Patient Health Questionnaires (PHQ-2) behavioral health screenings. Staff completed 12 referrals to Diversus Health and 3 referrals to Colorado Community Health Alliance (CCHA) for further evaluation and connection to resources to meet clients' specific behavioral health needs.

WIC continues to utilize an internal referral form developed for client facing services throughout Public Health. During August, 18 referrals were made to and from WIC, Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), HCP (a program for children and youth with special health care needs), Family Planning, and Colorado Quitline for smoking cessation support.

WIC staff continue to participate in workgroups including the Pikes Peak Breastfeeding Coalition, 0-3 Community Group Meeting, and the Prenatal Network, and partnerships with CPCD HeadStart and SafeCare, among others, to provide community referrals and needed

assistance for clients. WIC staff routinely attend Pikes Peak Library District Prenatal classes to share information about WIC and breastfeeding services.

Lactation Management Specialists (LMS) continue to provide video appointments via Teams to assist patients during latch appointments. Virtual breastfeeding classes are offered while in-person group classes are suspended. WIC Registered Dietitians began a limited number of in-person appointments for very high-risk clients. These mainly included latch appointments for mothers struggling to adapt to the use of technology and/or breastfeeding without WIC's support.

To enhance the client experience, WIC has updated Public Health's lactation and clinic spaces to support a diversity of clients, staff, and experiences. The lactation spaces now include small tables, better lighting, and wipeable covers for the chairs, among other enhancements. These improvements are intended to make the spaces more welcoming and safer for clients.

### **Immunization Program**

The Immunization Program continues to work toward a return to pre-COVID clinic operations. The clinic has been open five days per week, vaccinating children, adults and international travelers. In addition to COVID-19 vaccination support, the team is focused on the vaccination of clients who may have missed routine vaccines during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the "back-to-school" community need for childhood vaccinations. The program is also supporting the Operation House Call team and local long-term care facilities by providing the COVID vaccine to individuals who are homebound and residents/staff of nursing homes.

The Immunizations team continues to communicate with multiple community partners to obtain updates on providers' plans to promote flu vaccine with COVID vaccine, and to assess providers' capacity to surge upward when third "booster" doses of COVID vaccine are authorized.

### **Family Planning**

Family Planning worked with the Office of Communications to update the program's website and develop a video to promote the services provided to the community and provide information on how individuals can access these services. This project was in response to Family Planning's quarterly Information and Education Advisory Committee meeting. During this meeting community members expressed a desire to see increased advertising from Family Planning to reach a wider audience in our community and to inform community members of reproductive health services available to individuals of all income levels.

Family Planning continues its collaboration with the Southern Colorado Health Network (SCHN) to coordinate care for diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Family Planning staff attended a joint meeting with Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), SCHN and Peak Vista on August 23 to discuss an HIV+ collaborative protocol. Dr. Robert "Dinny" Weber, Infectious Disease Specialist, will provide education and

outreach to community providers to reduce and treat STIs in our community through funding from CDPHE, which began in September and ends December 2021.

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

NFP nurses conducted 190 visits during August. Of these, 139 visits were held via telehealth and 51 visits were conducted in-person. NFP graduated 4 clients and enrolled 6 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 clients by facilitating access to health services. NFP nurses have started to meet with clients in-person on a more regular basis and will continue to assess the safety of in-person appointments relative to the evolving COVID-19 situation.

### **Public Health Recognition**

The Government Finance Officers Association recognized El Paso County Public Health with its highest honor for transparency in budgeting with the *2021 Distinguished Budget Presentation Award*. The award was in recognition of the [2021 Budget Book](#) which was prepared by the Budget Division of El Paso County Financial Services. This is the second straight year Public Health has been cited for excellence in government budgeting.

Stephen Goodwin, El Paso County Public Health's Chief Scientific Data Strategist, recently received an Award for Technical Innovation in Public Health from the Colorado Public Health Association. This award was established in 1972 in recognition of P.W. Jacoe, a Colorado Board of Health member in the 1950s, for his devotion to duty, his excellence of work and accomplishments, his interest, his leadership and contributions to the physical science field of public health. The award is given to individuals who have made an outstanding technical innovation in public health.