



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting
HHSC Virtual Platform
July 15, 2021**

Member Name	Yes	No	Professional Representatives (non-members)
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	✓		
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH(c), MPH, RS		✓	
Steven M. Kotsatos, RS	✓		
Josh Ramirez, MPA, CPM		✓	
Eduardo Olivarez	✓		
Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPA, CPM	✓		
Angela Mora, M.A.Ed.		✓	
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH		✓	
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH		✓	
Rachel E. Sonne, MD, MPH		✓	
State Representative Bobby Guerra		✓	Represented by Jasmine Owen
Senator Eddie Lucio Jr.		✓	

Attendees Present

Francesca Kupper, John Villarreal, David Gruber, Dr. John Hellerstedt, Dr. Allison Banicki, Edith de Lafuente, Alberto Perez, Tony Aragón, Jasmine Owen, Mackenzie Spahn, and Úrsula Solorzano.

Agenda Item I: Call to Order, Welcome, Chair Remarks, Meeting Logistics and TFBHO Roll Call

Chair Guajardo opened the meeting at 1:00 pm. She thanked and welcomed attendees to the Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) meeting. Chair Guajardo announced that Commissioner John Hellerstedt was in attendance and asked if he wanted to share a few words from the state perspective.

Dr. Hellerstedt thanked Chair Guajardo and everyone who works in public health. He expressed how he wanted to discuss successes and difficult victories, despite the loss of life, which has been difficult for everyone. He also mentioned how we've come a long way due to effective leadership at all levels. In the beginning of the pandemic, there were achievements from non-pharmaceutical interventions (mask wearing, social distancing, good hygiene, etc.) to recent vaccination program successes. He encouraged all to continue to take measures to contain adverse trends to avoid another resurgence of coronavirus infection. We have clear and convincing data that the vaccine is both safe and effective to rid the population of the pandemic.



Chair Guajardo thanked the Dr. Hellerstedt and expressed how south Texas has experienced promising vaccination rates and hopes that the trends continue, while promoting public health infrastructure as the key to success.

Chair Guajardo asked production staff if Senator Lucio or Representative Guerra were attending. Jasmine Owen stated that she was representing Representative Guerra's office. Chair Guajardo welcomed and thanked her for attending and asked Ms. Kupper to continue with the roll call.

Chair Guajardo asked Ms. Francesca Kupper to continue with the official roll call. Ms. Kupper reminded members to announce themselves by stating their name before speaking and to mute their devices when not speaking and read open meeting/virtual platform guidelines and proceeded to the roll call. A quorum wasn't confirmed. She stated that the meeting could continue without any voting or action taken but members could discuss topics on the agenda. Chair Guajardo welcomed and thanked all attendees for joining the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves. DSHS staff introduced themselves.

Agenda Item II: Consideration of May 20, 2021, Meeting Minutes

Chair Guajardo announced that the approval of the May 20, 2021 Meeting Minutes will be tabled until the next meeting.

Agenda Item III: Update: COVID-19 Vaccine

Chair Guajardo welcomed Mr. Antonio Aragon, Immunization Unit Director (DSHS). Mr. Aragon thanked Chair Guajardo and continued with his update by stating that 25.5 million doses have been administered to date since December 14, 2020, which equates to 14.2 million with at least one dose and 12.3 million people who are fully vaccinated. He explained that the approximate population for the entire state of Texas is 24 million, so roughly half of the state is fully vaccinated (numbers include children 12 years and above). He detailed the following data (includes two doses from either Pfizer or Moderna or one dose from the Johnson & Johnson vaccine):

12-15 years old = 22%
16-49 years old = 44%
50-64 years old = 63%
65-79 years old = 75%
80+ years old = 69%

He also stated that border states have done a great job on vaccination coverage with approximately 60% coverage in vaccination rates, which is higher compared to the rest of the country.

Associate Commissioner David Gruber spoke of the efficacy of vaccine in relation to Delta variant. He explained that data from the UK is relevant because they've experienced a spike with the Delta variant. In general, the vaccine



is effective against the Delta variant as it relates to reducing the severity of the disease in terms of hospitalizations but is not as effective to transmissibility even with those vaccinated. Severity is measured by severity by hospitalizations and death so the message should be to continue to vaccinate.

Chair Guajardo asked if Mr. Aragon had cumulative data by age ranged for the Texas border? Mr. Aragon stated that he'd be able to report on those figures. Chair Guajardo thanked him and expressed that south Texas has always had good immunization rates prior to the pandemic so she wasn't surprised to see good vaccination rates. She also mentioned that it would be important to show that there is a different mindset on the border when it comes to vaccinations. She also mentioned how border areas are large tourist attractions and if there are tourists visiting from largely unvaccinated areas, it could have an impact in border regions.

She also asked if the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was still in production. Mr. Aragon explained that it's not currently in production due to the amount of stock that is already available and the expiration dates of those vaccines. He stated that an update from the CDC/FDA is expected soon regarding the expansion of the expiration dates to August.

Vice Chair Olivarez asked if he' be able to update members on such an extension due to the public health initiative among border states. Mr. Aragon stated that he would be able to provide an update and asked all members to continue to promote the vaccine. Chair Guajardo also mentioned that such an update is crucial, especially if the border opens to everyone again. It might be helpful to have a one dose vaccine available for border populations.

Chair Guajardo reminded attendees that August is Vaccination Awareness Month and efforts will be to promote vaccination with students returning to school. Mr. Aragon stated that the pandemic has impacted the "Back-to-School Program." They began to see a trend of children going back to school, many of which may not be up to date on vaccines. We need to continue to educate that we can co-administer COVID vaccines with other vaccines as we look at different ways to increase vaccine competency.

Dr. Rodriguez also asked about a report that could detail vaccine type. Mr. Aragon stated that could be provided as well. Mr. Kotsatos asked about prospective booster shots. Mr. Aragon stated that efficacy studies about booster shots and how they respond to the Delta variant are expected this fall. Chair Guajardo thanked Mr. Aragon and Mr. Gruber and moved on to the next topic.

Agenda Item IV: Review Recommendations Narratives (COVID-19) as part of the short-term plan

Chair Guajardo explained that the recommendations report submitted in 2018 was the first report, which included needs associated with long-term goals. She also clarified that the statute calls for short and long-term plans as part of the recommendations. She asked members if they preferred to list the short-term recommendations, most of which are



Covid-related, or provide narratives for them. Dr. Rodriguez and Vice Chair Olivarez agreed that because Covid-related data is so fluid right now, more tools may be available to amend some recommendation that may not have been available originally. Members agreed to create a template with the listed recommendations and assess if it needs additional detail, once a more complete draft of the report is completed.

Agenda Item V: Discussion: Long-term Plan Recommendations

Chair Guajardo expressed that recommendations that are part of the long-term plan are more in line with previous recommendations that are consistent with long-term goals. Vice Chair Olivarez mentioned that there may be other systems put in place by DSHS on fluid public health topics, such as a new state-wide EMR system, immunization enhancements and new TB software that may help us with our recommendations that may impact local health departments. He also mentioned that Texas may be receiving Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity funding, which will impact our decisions and recommendations. Chair Guajardo recommended that long-term plan recommendations follow the same format as done in the 2018 Report, which included the recommendation and a narrative discussion.

Agenda Item VI: Public Comment

Chair Guajardo asked Ms. Kupper if there were any public comments submitted. Ms. Kupper asked the producers if any public comments were received. The production staff confirmed that no requests for public comments were received.

Agenda Item VII: Closing Remarks, Adjourn and Thank you

Chair Guajardo summarized next steps and providing a draft of the report. She reminded members that the next meeting was September 9 at 1:00 pm (CST). She thanked members for attending and adjourned the meeting at 2:07 p.m.