



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting
HHSC Virtual Platform
April 12, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

Member Name	Yes	No	Professional Representatives (non-members)
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH, MPH, RS	✓		
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	✓		
Shannon Harvill	✓		
Steven M. Kotsatos, RS, CPM	✓		
Hector Ocaranza, MD, MPH	✓		
Eduardo Olivarez	✓		
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH	✓		
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH	✓		
Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPH, CPM		✓	
Rachel E. Sonne, MD, MPH	✓		
Nancy Treviño	✓		
State Representative Bobby Guerra		✓	
Senator (ex-officio member - vacant)			

Attendees Present

Karin Hopkins, John Villarreal, Jacqueline Thompson, Francesca Kupper, John Chacon, Tony Aragon, Dr. Allison Banicki, Guillermo Zenizo, Alberto Perez, Jose Muñoz, Edith de Lafuente, Alejandra Villarreal.

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

Chair Olivarez welcomed attendees to the Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) meeting. He opened the meeting at 1:00 pm and asked Ms. Francesca Kupper to initiate the roll call. She introduced production staff, provided logistical announcements, proceeded with the roll call, and confirmed a quorum. Chair Olivarez welcomed and moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item II: Consideration of April 12, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Chair Olivarez asked members to review the April 12, 2023, Meeting Minutes. He asked if any edits were requested. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Prot made the first motion while Dr. Ocaranza seconded the motion. Chair Olivarez asked Ms. Kupper to



initiate a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes. The motion carried and the minutes were approved. She turned the meeting back to Chair Olivarez.

Agenda Item III: Update: COVID-19 Vaccines and boosters

Chair Olivarez introduced Mr. Aragon to provide the update. He started his update by informing that the White House is likely to announce the end of the public health emergency period regarding the pandemic on May 11, 2023. He also stated the state of Texas may also declare it on the same date. Another update is about the COVID-19 vaccine transferring to the Texas Vaccines for Children Program (TVFC). The COVID vaccine will be treated as a routine vaccination. Currently, there is no official date, but we expect this to happen this fall between September – November. The state impact will affect Immtrac, the state vaccine registry, because it will become an opt-out vaccine, meaning there is no longer a need for consent. Therefore, about 30 percent of the information will be removed from the registry. Basically, we'll return to pre-COVID times regarding vaccine consent since the emergency declaration is no longer in place. The COVID vaccine will still be available and free of charge to certain individuals under the age of 18. There have been questions about adults who are uninsured or underinsured. There may be a vaccine program for adults, but we aren't currently aware of what the federal laws will be after May 11. The adult safety net component is a concern, especially for the elderly community, so I'll keep you abreast of that topic in future meetings. We've heard that the COVID vaccine may become a one-dose seasonal vaccine. It may be a two-dose series, followed by it becoming a seasonal vaccine.

Chair Olivarez asked about current COVID vaccine inventory. Mr. Aragon explained that providers were supposed to exhaust the monovalent vaccine, since it's now expired. Providers should only be using the bivalent vaccine as we approach the time when it gets commercialized. Chair Olivarez asked if other members had questions.

Ms. Guajardo asked about the May 11 date and if the end of the pandemic would also be recognized by the state. She asked if there would be a press release regarding this information. Mr. Aragon clarified that the federal government would declare May 11 the end of the emergency-use of the vaccine but are waiting to hear from state officials as well. He confirmed that a press release would be available with pertinent information about the topic.

Dr. Chamberlain asked about both the TVFC and the adult safety net, as it relates to those who are un-insured or under-insured. He also asked about the cost of the vaccine. Mr. Aragon understood his concerns and stated he'd keep the group as updated as possible and mentioned that he's heard the vaccine may cost between \$50-\$100 per dose. He added that the price could drop to \$10-\$20 per dose but would have to wait until the fall to confirm the information after receiving federal guidance. He also explained that COVID-19 has moved from a pandemic to an endemic level, meaning that it is part of everyday life, much like chicken pox and other vaccine-preventable diseases. Chair Olivarez asked if there was any indication of it becoming a mandated vaccine. Mr. Aragon stated there was no indication that it would become a mandated vaccine. He also clarified that it wouldn't be a mandated



vaccine for school entry. Chair Olivarez thanked Mr. Aragon and moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item IV: Discussion: Consideration of adding new members to the TFBHO

Chair Olivarez asked Mr. Villarreal to initiate the discussion. He explained that this topic stemmed from Mr. Steven Kotsatos moving from the City of McAllen to the City of Mission Health Department. They hadn't been previously represented as part of the TFBHO as they are now, so the topic of equitable representation of other border areas surfaced. He mentioned that he had communicated this to Drs. Ringsdorf and Sonne in Public Health Regions 8 and 9/10. He learned that there were discussions of Maverick County possibly initiating a health department and invited Dr. Ringsdorf for her input.

She explained that City of Eagle Pass council members were inquiring about a local health authority designee and that it looked very promising. Presently, they're unsure of how a local health department will be formed, whether it will be city or county. They may partner with a hospital district. There is also a promising prospect in Val Verde County if they can commit the time.

Dr. Sonne expressed that Public Health Region 9/10 has 11 border-adjacent counties that border Mexico and eight additional counties. She mentioned that the City of Presidio has a very active binational health council with its sister city of Ojinaga, whereby they have an international border crossing. The current county judge is the first in a long time to be from Presidio and continued to mention other important members of the community.

Chair Olivarez thanked them for their input and opened the topic for discussion. Ms. Guajardo asked about ex-officio members. Mr. Villarreal explained that he had asked Governmental Affairs staff months ago about ex-officio members. They wouldn't likely learn of any news until after the legislative session, but they are fully aware of the vacant positions. Ms. Hopkins stated that current membership is composed by position as opposed to appointed individuals. Mr. Villarreal explained that he was checking with legal staff regarding official vetting protocol. Chair Olivarez thanked everyone for their feedback and suggested that this topic be continued in a future meeting after the legislative session is completed and initiated a 10-minute break at 2:00pm.

Agenda Item V: Discussion: Future meetings with Border Councils of Government

Chair Olivarez re-opened the meeting at 2:10pm and asked Ms. Kupper to initiate a roll call vote. She confirmed a quorum and turned the meeting back to Chair Olivarez. He asked that Mr. Villarreal open the next agenda item. He reminded members on his presentation to the Texas Association of Regional Councils (TARC) and asked for their direction in terms of meeting with border councils of government (COGs). He had been asked to inquire about



the possible creation of a tire abatement task force and inquired of other topics members would like to discuss at a future meeting. Chair Olivarez suggested that a TARC representative conduct a presentation at a future meeting and Ms. Guajardo agreed. He also requested that a representative from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality be invited to a future meeting. Dr. Prot requested that a DSHS representative be invited to discuss regulatory issues. Mr. Villarreal reminded members that representatives from these agencies had previously presented and that he'd invite them to present again.

Ms. Guajardo also mentioned that she was interested in taking the vector exam that had resulted from Texas Department of Agriculture's (TDAG) Category 13 limited use vector spraying license. She explained that this particular exam seemed to be discouraged and described as more difficult than the standard vector exam. Mr. Villarreal explained that this was contradictory to what had been previously stated. Ms. Harvill also concurred that when she took the test last year, the TDAG encouraged the standard vector test, as opposed to the one that was border-specific, noting that it was a better test to take, career-wise, if one moves away from the border. Ms. Guajardo also mentioned that the legislation didn't create change if the vector test isn't being encouraged. Mr. Kotsatos explained that 90 percent of McAllen's staff is vector licensed. Ms. Treviño confirmed that 27 staff members have been licensed and passed the test to receive the non-commercial subdivision applicator license. Mr. Villarreal stated that he would communicate with TDAG to inquire of this topic.

Dr. Sonne agreed that the border-centric vector test should be encouraged. She also noted that she was familiar with the three border COGs in her region but not because of work with the task force. Therefore, she agreed with Chair Olivarez to invite TARC and TCEQ to provide a presentation and perhaps a round table discussion to learn more about mutual endeavors. Dr. Ringsdorf also agreed that both agencies should be invited to present again.

Chair Olivarez proposed that a TARC representative present at a future meeting. After that, an invitation can be extended to border COGs. He also requested that a DSHS Consumer Protection Division representative be invited to a future meeting before inviting TCEQ. Members agreed with his proposal. Mr. Villarreal stated that he'd send a link of previous meetings whereby each of these entities had provided presentations.

Agenda Item VI: Final Review: Mosquito-borne Diseases Plan

Ms. Hopkins thanked members for their feedback on the Border Mosquito-borne Diseases Plan. She explained that all suggested edits were incorporated into the revised plan. It now includes a map that shows which border local health departments include mosquito spraying services. She invited members to offer suggestions on the dissemination of this plan and asked if members had any questions.

Dr. Sonne recommended that the plan also be placed on the mosquito-borne illness web page that resides within the Laboratory and Infectious Diseases Division. Ms. Hopkins thanked her for the suggestion. Ms. Guajardo inquired of other municipalities that offer vector-control services. Chair Olivarez encouraged members to send a list of municipalities that offer these services to Mr. Villarreal. Dr. Sonne also suggested that local and state



officials also receive this plan; Dr. Chamberlain concurred. Ms. Hopkins requested if Governmental Affairs could inquire on sharing the plan with elected officials. Chair Olivarez asked that all other recommendations be sent to Mr. Villarreal and moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item VII: Discussion: Subcommittee Reporting

Chair Olivarez noted that there was nothing to report.

Agenda Item VIII: South Texas Binational Conference

Chair Olivarez asked Mr. Alberto Perez to update members on the 10th Annual Binational Conference that will take place on May 24th in Edinburg, Texas. He explained that it's the first time that it moved from Laredo to the Rio Grande Valley. The conference is a good opportunity offer awareness on border public health activities and projects. He also noted that it would be a good opportunity to engage with new officials from the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Public Health Region 11 staff re-engaged with those new officials earlier in the year. He also stated that the conference would include binational topics, such as the binational tuberculosis project, binational issues regarding syphilis, and other border public health topics. He also stated that continuing education units will also be offered as part of the conference. Chair Olivarez thanked him for his presentation and suggested that Food and Drug Administration topics would be an added benefit to the conference. He thanked Mr. Perez for his work and inquired if such a conference would also take place in other border regions. Mr. Perez explained that this conference would only take place in south Texas. Chair Olivarez asked about binational health council meetings. Drs. Chamberlain and Ocaranza noted that such meetings continue to occur in their respective areas. Chair Olivarez thanked members for their binational work and moved to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item IX: Public Comment

Chair Olivarez asked Ms. Kupper if any public comments were submitted. She confirmed that no public comments were submitted for this meeting.

Agenda Item X: Closing remarks, thank you and adjourn

Chair Olivarez thanked everyone for meeting. Dr. Prot asked if an update could be given regarding the recent CDC-funded Border Infectious Disease and Surveillance project. Ms. Hopkins informed that they visited Public Health Region 9/10 last year. This year they visited Public Health Regions 8 and 11 and thanked everyone involved for the successful project site visits. She mentioned that there had been some surveying challenges during the pandemic to inquire about epidemiological surveillance data, including symptoms and what types of vaccines people had received. She also explained the importance of the project site visits because the program funds the three epidemiologists in each of the border regions, who also meet with epidemiologists of other border states. She clarified that this project was for all border states, not just Texas. She stated that it was a successful visit and that they were impressed with the work being done in Texas. It was also a unique opportunity



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for them to experience the unique challenges our state has and the diversity among our border, since they are based in San Diego, California.

Chair Olivarez thanked Ms. Hopkins and all other border staff that were involved. He also mentioned that it was important to receive this type of border update, despite it not being on the agenda. He asked if any members had any closing remarks. Dr. Prot thanked Ms. Hopkins for her update and requested that a legislative update be included in the next meeting. She also asked if Dr. Chamberlain could provide a local mental health overview. Chair Olivarez requested that Mr. Villarreal add these items to the next meeting.

Mr. Kotsatos also commented about a proposed bill to eliminate code enforcement and sanitarian licenses. The Texas Environmental Health Association spoke against this action and the proposed legislation was halted. He noted how important it is to stay informed of proposed legislations that could adversely affect public health. Dr. Sonne praised Governmental Affairs and the agency's Consumer Protection Division on tracking such proposed legislation. Chair Olivarez asked if other members had any closing remarks. None came forward; he thanked members for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 3:33 p.m.