



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting
HHSC Virtual Platform
February 9, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

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

Attendees Present

Francesca Kupper, John Chacon, Karin Hopkins, John Villarreal, Dr. John Hellerstedt, Art Alvarado, Jasmine Owen, Eric Owens, Kayla Kates-Brown, Tony Aragon, Dr. Allison Banicki, Rosy de los Santos, Adriana Corona-Luevanos, Alberto Perez, Rick Garza, Steve Eucker, David Gruber, Joe Williams, and Katie Moore.

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 commenced the meeting at 1:01 pm. and asked for members and attendees to introduce themselves. He thanked them for attending and welcomed Dr. Hellerstedt to the meeting. He also asked if Senator Lucio, Representative Guerra or other legislators or their staff were present. Jasmine Owen attended on behalf of Representative Guerra. He then introduced Ms. Francesca Kupper, and she acknowledged the rest of the HHSC production staff. She continued with logistical announcements and reminded members of the meeting/virtual platform guidelines. She proceeded to the roll call and eight members were present to establish a quorum and she turned the meeting over to Chair Olivarez. He also welcomed invited guests and speakers and continued with the meeting.



Agenda Item II: Consideration of February 9, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Chair Olivarez asked members to review the December 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes. He asked for members to review the meeting minutes and requested for a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes. Mr. Josh Ramirez provided the first while Mr. Steven Kotstatos seconded the motion. Chair Olivarez acknowledged the motions and asked Ms. Kupper to initiate a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes. The motion carried and the minutes were approved.

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

Chair Olivarez welcomed Mr. Tony Aragon, Immunization Unit Director (DSHS) and Mr. David Gruber, Associate Commissioner for Regional and Local Health Operations to provide the COVID-19 Vaccine Update. Mr. Aragon began by informing members that 41 million doses have been administered, which is an incredible feat because 6-8 million doses are usually administered annually under normal circumstances. That equates to the following approximate figures:

20 million people vaccinated with at least one dose
17 million people fully vaccinated
6 million people have received a booster dose.

There is a lot of room for improvement because many people can benefit from the additional benefits of protection against COVID-19. Waning immunity exists among people who are immunocompromised. The booster dose is important because it adds additional protection against current and future variants.

Mr. Aragon continued by stating that Pfizer would soon be initiating a new age expansion for children from 6 months to 4 years of age pending approval. Currently, Pfizer vaccine is approved for children 5 years and older. If approved, administration may begin by the end of the month or sometime in March. Providers can order the vaccine now but won't be able to administer until CDC approves it. Small allocations will be sent to states and other jurisdictions initially. Providers can also order doses based on availability. Additionally, on January 31, the Moderna vaccine officially changed their name to Spikevax.

Chair Olivarez asked if members had any questions for Mr. Aragon. Members asked questions about vaccine data per county and about anti-viral and therapeutic medications. Mr. Aragon answered the questions accordingly. Chair Olivarez confirmed that Mr. Gruber didn't have additional updates.

Chair Olivarez welcomed Dr. Hellerstedt to continue the conversation. He informed members that his mantra was now focused on boosters. He encouraged everyone to continue to promote countermeasures such as distancing, mask-wearing, including vaccines and handwashing. The most plentiful countermeasure is the vaccine, which is free and widely available. He reminded all that there are still 10 million Texans that are eligible for



the booster dose, which provide long-term advantages to health. He also mentioned that while many believe they shouldn't bother to get the vaccine or boosters because people get COVID anyway. Unfortunately, with the Omicron variant, that is true to some degree, but it's not 100 percent true; getting the booster really does decrease the probability of getting ill. It absolutely decreases the number of people who go to the hospital or go to the grave because of COVID infection. He continued by stating that data shows that unvaccinated people are 97 times more likely to lose their life to Covid compared to vaccinated people. He reminded everyone that thousands of lives have been saved because of monoclonal infusion therapy. He also referenced the public health efforts are well understood but emphasized the fear of people having 2020 blindsight whereby many may have forgotten the loss of life and questioned why they made us do all these things; it all turned out okay, leading to a fundamental dilemma of prevention. Without public health protocols, it could have been much worse if we hadn't taken those precautions seriously. We need to help people understand the value of public health.

Members agreed and provided feedback regarding the severity of the pandemic and the tragedies that occurred, including the loss of life and childhood and the devastating repercussions of what crippling diseases cause and how COVID vaccine was an answer to many prayers. Chair Olivarez mentioned that people should realize the fact of how safe the vaccine is and how effective it is. He asked if any other members had any questions or comments for Dr. Hellerstedt. He thanked Dr. Hellerstedt for attending the meeting and for his support and moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item IV: Discussion: Promoting the Registered Sanitarian Profession

Chair Olivarez introduced Mr. Rick Garza, Multi Program Specialist, Regulatory Program Management from the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. Mr. Garza conducted a presentation with notes from the last time he presented in 2019 and additional information on how best to promote the sanitarian profession in Texas. His presentation covered the application process, including the sanitarian in training position. He also covered registration and corresponding requirements, rules and regulations, application, and fees regarding the profession.

Chair Olivarez thanked Mr. Garza for his presentation and expressed the goal of enhancing the registered sanitarian profession programmatically along the border and making it more accessible at the collegiate level as well. He also referenced cultural customs and traditions from Latin America that have influence on the border and how important it will be to collaborate with school systems and universities. He thanked Mr. Garza and moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item V: Discussion: DSHS' role regarding food inspections, water safety, microbiology



Chair Olivarez introduced Joe Williams and he, in turn, introduced Katie Moore, both from Retail Food Safety Branch Manager, Consumer Protection Program, Public Sanitation/Retail Food Safety Branch at DSHS. He informed members that he'd cover programmatic operations, including inspections, followed by Ms. Moore who will cover items regarding swimming pools and splash pads.

Mr. Williams conducted his presentation and reviewed a variety of topics from food establishment rules and manufacturing practices to jurisdictional regulations. Mr. Moore's part of the presentation focused on aquatic facilities, including swimming pools, splash pads, spa standards and codes. Both provided detailed information on the related topics. They answered questions from members and Chair Olivarez thanked them for their presentation.

Agenda Item VI: Update: S.B. 1312 (86th Legislature Required Practicum – internal collaborative project)

Chair Olivarez introduced John Villarreal who reminded members about the rapid regional response plan that was being produced by Paul Grunenwald, State Veterinarian and acting Director for Infectious Disease and Prevention Section at DSHS. Mr. Villarreal noted that although Mr. Grunenwald is the state veterinarian, he's completing this project as a practicum for his doctorate program.

Mr. Grunenwald informed members of his plans to work with regional, central office and local health department staff to comply with the statute. He informed members that he is pursuing a doctorate in community health practice and is utilizing this project to complete his practicum. He also mentioned that he had collaborated with Office of Border Public Health since the onset of this project and will be producing an outline of the plan as his next step. The project will continue through the end of August.

Chair Olivarez thanked Mr. Grunenwald and asked members if they had any questions. There were no questions and he moved to the next agenda topic.

Agenda Item VII: Break

Chair Olivarez announced the break at 2:48 p.m. He re-convened the meeting at 2:58 p.m.

Agenda Item VIII: Subcommittee Confirmations

Chair Olivarez opened the conversation to determine and confirm subcommittee membership. Members discussed changes in roles and future subcommittee meetings in preparation for the upcoming 2022 Recommendations Report.



**Agenda Item IX: Discussion: Top three recommendations options;
Subcommittee updates on recommendations**

Chair Olivarez asked a representative from each subcommittee to report on recommendation updates. He started with the Environmental Health Subcommittee. Mr. Steve Kotsatos provided updates regarding on the promotion and retention of Registered Sanitarians. Chair Olivarez also opened the conversation regarding illegal tire dumping, which leads to mosquito borne illnesses due to water trapping in tires. He also referenced failed legislation that has failed in the past and asked for updates on this topic. Members discussed this topic as well.

The conversation shifted to the Communicable Diseases and Chronic Diseases Subcommittees led by Dr. Prot, one of which referenced the childhood obesity. Ms. Owen of Representative Guerra's office expressed interest in the topic. Chair Olivarez referenced an educational component that might be strengthen this particular recommendation to aid in the prevention of diabetes in children, especially on the border. Dr. Prot expressed DSHS' role in providing facts on higher rates of childhood obesity on the border to aid with this recommendation. Chair Olivarez also noted possible links of complications of COVID-19 with diabetes patients and its importance with pediatric health.

Chair Olivarez moved to the Public Health Infrastructure Subcommittee and expressed interest in Health Information Exchange topic to improve communication between health care facilities and public health departments, including the integration of epidemiology and direct patient treatment. He also noted the potential development of information exchange between emergency medical and laboratory reporting systems at the state level to improve communication with regional and local public health department systems. Dr. Rodriguez also expressed the concern of expensive costs to join current systems.

Chair Olivarez moved onto the Maternal Child Health Subcommittee. Dr. Ringsdorf provided an update and explained that she'll meeting with the Maternal Child Health Program to strengthen related recommendations.

Mr. Villarreal asked for clarification if the four recommendations discussed would be the only ones included in the report. Chair Olivarez and Dr. Rodriguez mentioned the importance of all subcommittee work, especially when referring to short vs. long-term recommendations. They acknowledged that it may be best to narrow the scope for this year's report.

Chair Olivarez thanked Ms. Hopkins for her suggestion of having both short and long-term scopes for each recommendation.

Agenda Item X: Consideration to approve bylaws *

Chair Olivarez referred to Mr. Villarreal regarding bylaws updates. He detailed the suggested edits to the bylaws. Members agreed with the changes and asked Mr. Villarreal to confirm to exceptions he noted. Chair Olivarez requested for a motion to approve the bylaws. Ms.



Guajardo made a motion to accept the bylaws and Mr. Kotsatos seconded the motion. Mr. Chacon initiated a roll call vote to approve bylaws with edits presented during the meeting pending review and approval from Office of Chief Counsel and Advisory Committee Coordination Office. There was a unanimous vote to approve the bylaws; the motion carried.

Agenda Item XI: Public comment

Chair Olivarez asked Mr. Chacon if any public comments were submitted. He confirmed that no pre-registered comments were submitted. Mr. Villarreal confirmed that there were no oral testimonies registered; there were no public comments.

Agenda Item XII: Closing remarks, thank you and adjourn

Chair Olivarez thanked all members for attending. He also thanked Dr. Hellerstedt for attending earlier. He let members know that the next meeting would be held on March 31st. He asked members if there were any comments or closing remarks; there were none. He adjourned the meeting at 4:23 pm. and Mr. Chacon asked production staff to end the recording.