

Boston University Medical Campus

Community Liaison Committee (CLC)

National Emerging Infectious Diseases Laboratories (NEIDL)

MEETING NOTES

Tuesday February 16, 2021

4:00 pm. * Zoom

ATTENDING

J. Kevin Fisher, CLC; Jean Lee, CLC; Robert Timmerman, CLC; Jim Keeney, CLC; Paulette Ford, CLC; James Eliscar, CLC, Norman Stembridge (Guest); Valeda Britton, Executive Director, Community Relations/MED, BU; Elizabeth Leary, Executive Director, Government & Community Affairs; Dr. David Hamer, Professor of Global Health and Medicine, BU; Dr. Ronald Corley, BU Department of Microbiology, Director, NEIDL

Presenter Introduction by Dr. Corley, NEIDL Director.

COVID-19- An Update

Dr. Hamer is a Professor of Medicine (Infectious Diseases) at BU School of Medicine and Professor of Global Health at BU School of Public Health. He is Board Certified in Infectious Diseases.

Controlling COVID-19 on urban residential campuses is challenging. It has been especially challenging because BU has two campuses, Charles River and the Medical Campus. In the Spring of 2020, public and private educational institutions closed. We did not have a reopening date. It was evident that we needed comprehensive health and safety procedures and measures to deal with this pandemic. BU began building COVID-19 response teams internally. Over the Spring and Summer BU began to develop and implement strategies to allow for a Fall 2020 reopening, including residential halls. In the Fall, they launched hybrid learning model, Learn from Anywhere (LfA) that would permit remote as well as in person learning.

Shortly thereafter Back2BU (BU's COVID Surveillance program) was rolled out. It involved the following features:

1. Dedensification of housing, labs and classrooms
2. Facial coverings were required
3. Enhanced cleaning protocols were promoted
4. Daily health attestations were required
5. Testing and contact tracing became more standardized
6. Isolation and quarantine were utilized
7. A hybrid learning model (LfA) allowed remote and in person learning

During this time, it should be noted that BU designed and built its own clinical testing lab with the capacity to do between 6,000-8,000 tests for SARS-CoV-2 per day. BU hired 150 staff and the lab was open from 7am-9pm seven days a week. The tests were collected from five sites across both campuses. The average processing time for the test results was less than 24 hours.

Dr. Hamer said that BU's contact tracing team did a great job and made a real difference because a portion of the COVID-19 cases were asymptomatic and without frequent testing, would have gone undetected. Also, testing allowed close contacts to be notified of potential exposure in a few hours of someone testing positive for COVID-19. Of those close contacts, some were found to be positive within the quarantine window.

Dr. Hamer remarked that there were a few COVID-19 spikes at BU after Indigenous People's Day, Halloween and Thanksgiving due to people gathering. The Thanksgiving spike was largest among undergraduates and staff, not faculty. He believes that the best approach to fighting COVID-19 relied on core infection control strategies such as:

1. Frequent symptom testing;
2. Early & effective contact tracing;
3. Rapid isolation & quarantine;
4. A strong leadership structure at BU; and
5. Rapid adaptation to emerging data.

Dr. Hamer reported that NEIDL's Dr. Connor is sequencing positive samples of COVID-19 from BU's Testing Lab to see if new variants/strains appear and exploring their paths of transmission. This information will be shared internally, locally and statewide to help understand public health efforts to control COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

Dr. Hamer then took a few questions from the CLC. On the question about taking 1 dose of the Moderna vaccine and taking a second dose of another vaccine such as Pfizer, he said that more information was needed, but he recommended taking both doses of the same vaccine. He said that researchers still do not know what makes a good vaccine. As to whether one can still transmit COVID-19 to others after vaccination, he said that he knows that vaccines can prevent mortality and severe disease, but again more research is needed to answer transmission of the virus after vaccination. In the meanwhile, we should continue to wear masks and social distance.

NEIDL Director Update by Dr. Ron Corley:

Dr. Corley reminded the CLC that in February 2020, we received permission to start SARS-CoV-2 research. In March, our scientists started research on live samples of the coronavirus. Most researchers in the NEIDL started research on SARS-CoV-2/ COVID-19 shortly thereafter. Currently, the NEIDL is doing research on the virus in approximately 7 or 8 different labs at BSL-2, BSL-3 and BSL-4.

In response to a question about other infectious disease outbreaks, he stated that both the Democratic Republic of Congo and Guinea are battling new outbreaks of Ebola virus. In addition, the pandemic has led to a decline in healthcare around the world. He expects to see an uptick of Measles since 30-40 countries have halted Measles Vaccination programs. While Polio is endemic to only 2 countries, it may also reappear because vaccinations have stopped.

Government & Community Affairs (GCA) Updates:

Ms. Britton discussed the upcoming 75th Annual BPS Citywide Science Fair. A number of the NEIDL staff have signed up to judge middle and high school science and engineering projects. The NEIDL Speaker Series with Madison Park and Match High Schools is continuing.

Other Topics:

Next meeting – April 14, 2021 at 4pm; Location - Zoom

Meeting adjourned