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3 The following are summary minutes for the meeting of the **City of Las Cruces –**
4 **COVID-19 Task Force Committee** on January 19, 2022. At 3:30 p.m. at City Hall, 700
5 S. Main Street, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

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7 **Members Present:**

8 Tessa Abeyta-Stuve, City Councilor, District 2
9 Kasandra Gandara, City Councilor, District 1
10 Yvonne Flores, City Councilor, District 6

11
12 **Members Absent:**

13 Kathryn Olszowy, Ex-Officio member
14 Adrian Larson, MountainView, Member

15
16 **Others Present:**

17 Audrey Barela, Parks and Rec
18 Eric Enriquez, City Manager
19 Dawn Sanchez, Department of Health
20 Joshua Whaley, Department of Health
21 Stephen Lopez, Office of Emergency Management
22 Renee Armijo, Parks and Rec
23 Becky Baum, Recording Secretary, RC Creations, LLC

24
25 **I. Call to Order:** Chair Abeyta-Stuve called the meeting to order.

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27 **II. Conflict of Interest:** There was no conflict of interest.

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29 **III. Acceptance of the Agenda:** Board Member Flores motioned; Board Member
30 Gandara seconded. The agenda was accepted.

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32 **IV. Approval of the Minutes - December 15, 2021:** Board Member Gandara
33 motioned; Board Member Flores seconded. The minutes were approved.

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35 **V. Discussion Items:**

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37 **A. COVID-19 Vaccination Task Force**

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39 **i. Department of Health - Dawn Sanchez:** Dr. Whaley gave the
40 presentation. Cases in Doña Ana has been just over 47,000 as of
41 January 14th; roughly 215 cases per 1,000 persons. New cases
42 included 39 as of January 14th; increase of 18.8 per 1,000. The
43 positivity rate for the region is currently at 26.9%; a record for the
44 region but not where it should be.

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The case load for Doña Ana on a day to day basis from March, 2020 to January 14, 2022 is an average of 580 cases per day; when COVID pandemic began it was 500 cases per day statewide. The newest virus is the most rapidly moving one. The infection rate is at 1.4 which means every two people who have the virus goes on to infect three more people. The Delta variant seems to be coming to an end and a third of the cases were breakthrough cases of people that had been vaccinated. So far the Omicron variant has at least 43 out of 70 which have been breakthrough cases; no need to worry about percentages until more cases come through. A week to week standpoint was shown for the variants; each variant seems to take over the previous one.

Vaccination rates for Doña Ana County population 18 and over is at 94% have had at least one vaccine; 13.5% have had a single dose and are waiting for the second dose. There was comparisons made on those waiting for the second dose; December was lower than now. This change is either due to an increase in people receiving vaccinations or people not going back for their second. Population age five through 17 are now at roughly 50% with the vaccine. There was discussion on whether they are distributing the vaccinations equitably among the populations; not doing too well with the Hispanic population. Hidalgo County is not doing as well as Doña Ana County with vaccinations.

Between January 10th and February 1, 2021 roughly 17% of hospitalizations were breakthrough cases of vaccinated people, with 30% total cases and 10% of total deaths. The rolling average of cases per 100,000 broken down by vaccinated and unvaccinated was shown, higher chances of hospitalization for unvaccinated. There has been a spike in the last week or so in hospitalizations of children, especially under five years old. It is unclear at this point as to why. A percentage of new hospitalizations by age group was given; 65 and older had the most, followed by middle aged adults, and then the younger population.

Dawn Sanchez continued the discussion. There was discussion on the national shortage of COVID tests; Doña Ana is gaining more, as well as in home test kits. If someone has symptoms the best thing to do is be tested. At home test kits will be provided where a person will need to go online and request them; the state has purchased several which will be distributed throughout the state. More information will come with the test kits. If someone has a positive result the quarantine has now been reduced from 10 days to five days for both vaccinated and unvaccinated; if you don't have

1 symptoms after five days you can leave the house and wear a mask
2 for five days after. People are encouraged to not test immediately
3 after exposure; three to five days are better.
4

5 Additional vaccine information was given; those aged 18 and over
6 can get the vaccine plus booster. The booster for Pfizer has been
7 reduced to five months from six months. Vaccines can be changed
8 for the booster, mix and match vaccine producers, Pfizer, Moderna,
9 and J&J. Individuals aged 16 and 17 can get the primary and booster
10 vaccines five months after the second dose. Those immune-
11 compromised can get another booster; four doses total. Those aged
12 12 to 15 can receive a booster five months after receiving the second
13 dose. Only those 12 and up can get a booster. One can find vaccine
14 availability on the RTS website.
15

16 Premier Medical Group are doing the tests for children to stay in
17 schools and are also giving vaccine. They are at the Farm and
18 Ranch on Mondays and Tuesdays, and Doña Ana County building
19 on Motel Boulevard on Wednesdays. They will also provide vaccines
20 at their office on Solano Thursdays and Fridays. The Department of
21 Health are doing smaller events on Mondays, Thursdays, and
22 Fridays with their own staff. There is a FEMA bus rotating in the
23 southern part of the county for vaccines.
24

25 There was discussion on the importance of masks; the mandate is in
26 place until February 4th. People are encouraged to use surgical
27 masks, the KN95 masks, snug on the face. The masks with layers
28 are better protection than cloth masks. There was discussion of the
29 high cases and ways to combat that; test when exposed or feeling
30 bad, some anti-viral meds are coming out, careful indoors, maintain
31 social distances, and etc.
32

33 **ii. Office of Emergency Management - Stephen Lopez:** Mr. Lopez
34 gave the presentation. The cases continue to spike up as of last
35 night's data it is almost to 800 cases per day on seven day rolling
36 average. It is not expected to slow down anytime soon. There are
37 hints seen in data that the Omicron variant is dropping off and the
38 Delta variant is surging again; need more analysis. Nationally the
39 Omicron variant has peaked in the northeast.
40

41 The case fatality rates are at the lowest point in quite some time;
42 1.28% which is out of every 100 people who are COVID positive
43 there should be less than two people die. Some reasons for the low
44 number include Omicron being less severe, the monoclonal antibody
45 treatments, and etc. There is increasing illness with younger people
46 over the past month and a half; November and December the highest

1 case counts were in the K through 12 ages. Within the last 30 days
2 it's been 20 and 30 year olds but the last week has shown an
3 increase in teenagers and younger than teens.
4

5 The number of cases in the hospitals are still high; CDC data of those
6 cases were shown. The overall hospital admissions are down but
7 locally they are up. The state transfers patients into our hospitals if
8 there is space available. Additional information on booster doses
9 was shown; adults are doing well with total population close to 30%
10 receiving boosters. The peak vaccination happened over five
11 months ago which is why now there is an increase in breakthrough
12 cases; need to be up to date with boosters to minimize breakthrough
13 cases.
14

15 The local hospitals are continually strained; staff are affected
16 personally or has a family member affected with COVID causes
17 impact with quarantines. Fatality management remains a concern
18 but there is sufficient morgue capacity. One hospital is at full
19 capacity in their morgue; the other hospital has two of nine slots filled
20 in their morgue; one morgue trailer has 10 of 14 slots filled and the
21 other has zero of 15 filled. OEM has been distributing N95 to
22 municipal and county employees the past week to help ensure
23 continuity in government; roughly 10,000. Replacements have been
24 ordered and are expected by the end of next week; order was placed
25 early.
26

27 The FEMA vaccination bus will be at Organ Mountain Highschool this
28 weekend to give vaccinations and booster doses, and next week at
29 Young Park. The Department of Health purchased one million at
30 home test kits for the State of New Mexico out of their budget;
31 400,000 distributed last week to the northern part of the state and the
32 southern part should be distributed next week. The test kits are
33 identified to go to the zip code tabulation areas that have the highest
34 social vulnerability; over 35,000 are going within the City of Las
35 Cruces in four zip code areas: 88001, 88005, 88007, and 88012.
36

37 There was discussion on whether someone who has a booster shot
38 is less likely to contract COVID; DOH would need to find the data but
39 anecdotal evidence showing the booster dose does make a
40 difference. Another mass testing event will be set up at the Field of
41 Dreams with Las Cruces Public Schools. The information will be
42 promoted soon. There was discussion on the shipment of test kits
43 and equity, perhaps for another round sent out the southern part of
44 the state should receive the first shipment. There was a terse
45 conversation with the Governor's office about the equity of sending
46 out the test kits only to northern New Mexico and southern New

1 Mexico waiting over a week. The northern part of the state got
2 shipments first due to weather.
3

4 **iii. Area Hospitals Update:** There was no update.
5

6 **iv. City of Las Cruces Staff Update:** City Assistant Manager Enriquez
7 gave the presentation. N95 masks were received and currently
8 distributed to City employees. 1,800 masks were distributed on
9 Monday during an event with referrals to testing and vaccinations.
10 Scott Rogers will head up distributing the testing kits with a volunteer
11 crew; details of quantities and locations still need to be worked
12 through.
13

14 Chief Smith added that the epidemiology report is sobering. The Fire
15 Department continues with home bound vaccinations and boosters.
16 They are updating their policies to manage staffing internally for
17 isolation and quarantine periods. There was discussion on concern
18 with the number of Latinos being affected but not receiving vaccines;
19 need another layer of advocacy. Board Member Gandara suggested
20 partnering with the Diocese and other church's to help advocate with
21 vaccinations.
22

23 **v. Community Messaging:** Jamey Rickman stated they continue to
24 promote the messaging as appropriate; primarily the Council district
25 newsletter program and providing assets to the Communications
26 Office to use in social media. There was discussion of additional
27 layers of advocacy; perhaps pass out flyers or go door to door while
28 doing the test kits. There needs to be bilingual information as well
29 as have community help to be a trusted source. There is a National
30 Association of Latino Elected Officials which has a toolkit to work with
31 the Latino population.
32

33 **vi. Discuss:** There was discussion on tracking with rate of spread and
34 if there's been modelling to find the peak of the spread; currently
35 there isn't information readily available. It would be best to get as
36 many people boosted prior to the peak as possible as well as stock
37 up on resources. The Department of Health is working with the
38 promoters/community health workers canvassing the areas where the
39 FEMA bus is with flyers in English and Spanish. There was
40 discussion of using the Diocese to get masks out to the congregation
41 as well as work with PMG (Premier Medical Group) to set up mobile
42 areas for vaccinations and testing.
43

44 Gabe Jacquez with Las Cruces Public Schools stated that they have
45 a COVID meeting every morning to look at not only positive cases
46 but potential internal spread. The view is to keep schools open by

1 working hard to following protocols. This morning as a district there
2 is a 5% positivity day rate over a 14 day period. There is a three to
3 five percent threshold and then protocols are slowly implemented
4 and put in place. There's been discussion within the state of limiting
5 events and LCPS is watching that closely to continue maintaining
6 safety but have engagement.
7

8 The testing efforts are doing well but PMG is struggling to get rapid
9 tests. The past week had 2,550 tests through drive through and test
10 to stay. There was a little over 1,300 positive cases over the last 14
11 days: out of 27,000 people. There was discussion on watching for
12 whether giving the at home tests would overlap with specific schools;
13 if there is extra education needed. LCPS is willing to help in any
14 capacity. Keep in mind in giving out tests and the certain zip codes
15 and if schools and need for extra education.
16

17 **vii. Next Steps:**

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19 **VI. Future Discussion/Task Listing:** There are a few things to follow-up with next
20 month.
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22 **VII. Next Meeting Date - February 16, 2022:**

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24 **VIII. Adjournment:** Motion to adjourn by Board Member Flores, seconded by Board
25 Member Gandara, at 4:35.
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Chairperson

