Scott introductory remarks
- COVID is not going away but we have better tools to manage
- So important we work to remedy some of the harms caused by the mitigation measures we had to put in place before we had these tools: learning loss, strain on educators and health care providers, mental & SUD health impacts
- Addressing these impacts is a high priority
- AHS and DOE will share some of what they are focused on and goals for recovery

Commissioner Shirling, Department of Public Safety – last meeting before he leaves for role at UVM

Jenney Samuelson, Agency of Human Services
- We have reached a new phase of the pandemic where risk of disease and death are much lower
- Important for our wellbeing where we have now reached the phase we can socialize, see neighbors
- We are now focused on COVID-related impacts of our mitigation measures on housing, childcare, healthcare, mental health
- Top Priorities:
  - Increased substance use and acute mental health challenges
  - Further stabilize health care system and workforce
  - Need to support challenges to families and children, including housing instability
- We improve what we measure; we will be measuring:
  - Number of Vermonters seeing acute mental health services; deaths from suicide and overdose
  - Beds in health care facilities that are staffed and ready for Vermonters – hospitals, mental health facilities, LTC
  - Number in hospitals and EDs waiting to discharge to skilled nursing or other facilities
  - Track households in emergency housing program and ability to move to more permanent housing solutions
- Efforts have been underway in these areas, for example:
  - 988 nationwide crisis line
  - S. 11 health care workforce investments
  - Investments in housing

Dan French, Agency of Education
- have federally funded relief efforts remaining – need to make sure they have a long-term impact
- $280 million remaining – 10% to state DOE, 90% to school districts – came out last spring, need to spend in 2 years
- Every school district now has a recovery plan – posted on their website
- 10% state funds should be used in a strategic manner – for example, statewide supports for HVAC improvements
- Immediate goals:
  - Student academic needs, especially due to learning loss – tutoring, summer programs, remote instructional programs
  - Impact on social-emotional needs of students – wellness program for staff
Long term goals
- Each school district has strong & consistent instructional systems like curriculum development, professional development
- Integration of education and social services for youth
- Will be looking at existing metrics, especially SBAC testing in elementary level, high school metrics (% 3+ on AP exams, % completing career-technical program)

Mark Levine, MD, Vermont Department of Health
- Cases
  - End of last week, statewide COVID-19 levels were “low” and trajectory continues in this direction
    - Based on case count, new hospital admissions and percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by patients with COVID-19
  - 7 day hospitalization average is 35, ICU is 4
  - 1 death to date in June
  - ED visits with symptoms decreasing
  - Trends continue to show disease severity is less in those testing positive
- Vaccine updates
  - Pfizer & Moderna have submitted data on vaccine for children under 5; FDA committee meeting today and tomorrow; we do expect a favorable review but awaiting final FDA decision and CDC recommendation
  - Vaccines will likely be available before the end of June, possibly as soon as June 20
  - Will largely be at pediatrician and other health care provider offices
  - Some options to WIC families and walk-in clinics that will be listed on the website (no registration needed)
  - Also anticipate some update information on boosters for the fall
- Testing
  - State run testing sites closing June 25th – end of next week
  - No longer a necessity as tools to prevent COVID have evolved
  - Widely available at pharmacies and online
  - Order 3 rounds from the federal government
  - Pick up tests from state sites before the 25th
  - If you can’t find them elsewhere after the 25th call the Health Dept
- Understand this is stressful for those at-risk or in vulnerable populations, but we can now see COVID-19 as a disease we have the tools to fight – vaccines, treatment, testing
- While it looks like we are slowing or stepping back, this is not the case, we are stepping forward as the science evolves
- Expanding our focus beyond COVID to look at the negative impacts of living in a pandemic and moving to recovery – SUD, mental health, food insecurity, eating disorders, academic success, health behaviors
Questions:

We are 1 year to a day from hitting 80% immunization. What have we learned?
Scott: we have learned a great deal – remember in the beginning we didn’t even know how it was transmitted, can’t say enough about how Vermonters listened and followed guidance; ML: we have had to create new plans, respond differently to each variant – has created transitions and stress – have needed communication, transparency

Are we at a point were COVID is endemic?
ML: yes, we are transitioning to that – have to all work with each other as we make this transition

Are you worried about cases coming back this summer?
ML: risk seems to be very low right now and this summer – get outside, do things, interact – BA2 seems to have been through our population

Comments on safe injection sites for opioid overdose prevention?
ML: Opioid overdose has been a problem in our state from before the pandemic, we had been making harm reduction successes and were making progress before the pandemic – Narcan distribution, fentanyl test strips, syringe exchange, buprenorphine decriminalization; data on safe injections sites is growing but site locations are very different than a rural state like Vermont – using them as a major strategy may not be as successful here with dispersed population and services – we will continue to use the strategies we have been using

Comments on increased concerns about gun violence in school and threats that have come up in Vermont?
Scott: yes, understands the concern and number of threats are up, there are copycat situations – we want students to say something if they see or hear anything – we want people to feel comfortable reaching out to school officials or law enforcement; French – Vermont does have robust school safety program, threat assessment system – right now that is voluntary, considering making mandatory, assessing school safety plans

Is the expectation that there will not be another spike in the fall and winter like we did last year? Seems like we’re confident we will not have another spike.
Scott: this might be a misunderstanding of our optimism – we are focused on right now, this summer – I would expect this fall as we head indoors, we see other variants, the numbers will increase again – ML agrees with this

Are there any updates on mandatory immunization in children for the new school year?
Dan French – the immunization committee has not met since the winter – so no update on this now