

Email exchange which led to the writing of this Open Letter:

Dear Ms. Hutt,

Now that Dr. Levine has retired as Health Commissioner, I am curious about the process that is occurring to find a replacement. The Governor implied that the process has begun, but did not have the specifics.

Can you tell me more about the process and how the public can become involved?

Thank you!
Sincerely,
Amy Hornblas
Cabot, Vermont

Hello Amy,
The Agency of Human Services has been recruiting candidates with an open position posting for the past several months. They have identified some top candidates from that pool and they will propose a process for interview and selection from there. That has not yet begun. I'm not sure what you mean by the public being involved, I don't believe that we've traditionally utilized a public process for hiring our Commissioners- can you elaborate on that a bit?
Monica

May 12, 2025

An Open Letter to Governor Scott and Ms. Monica Hull,

As the administration considers candidates for the position of Vermont Health Commissioner, I hope we can find a way to include the public in the process. Perhaps the public has not been involved previously, but over the past five years the health department's influence on the daily lives of Vermonters has been unprecedented.

The Vermont Department of Health's Covid guidelines, in particular, led to a multi-year lock-down which included social distancing, temperature reading and tracking programs. In order to open for business, the department's guidance included the wide-spread mandatory use of medical products such as face masks, tests and vaccines.

From school to workplace settings, public transportation to public accommodation, health department guidelines impacted us all in ways we never before could have imagined. People lost their jobs and businesses, their health was impacted, and there are social ramifications such as increases in learning deficits, substance abuse and mental illness which still persist today.

Granted, many people in Vermont felt comforted by our former health commissioner, Dr. Levine, during those dark days. However, for those of us looking for substantive answers to our questions and scientific evidence to support the government's health measures, we were left out in the cold.

For example, in the summer of 2020, [when asked to explain the science behind the Governor's statewide mask mandate at a press conference](#), Dr. Levine was careful to be transparent about the fact that there are "several types of data" and that "much of it is conflicting." He failed to discuss the conflicting data, including his own [UVM study](#) which he had just concluded, which found that masks were correlated with an increase of Covid-19 cases.

During an April, 2025 episode of [Vermont Edition on Vermont Public Radio](#) celebrating the outgoing health commissioner, Dr. Levine admitted that his team chose to implement some of the most stringent Covid response measures in the country. He suggested that the health department had reached the conclusion that their interventions helped contribute to Vermont's low number of Covid deaths.

However, correlation is not causation. We do not know what would have happened if no restrictions and interventions were imposed. We do not know what impact each intervention had in a positive or negative direction. We can make an assumption from such a correlation, but not a scientific conclusion.

Covid deaths may have been low, but meanwhile there has been an unprecedented increase in overall mortality in Vermont since the Covid health measures were put in place.

According to the [Vermont Department of Health's Vital Statistics](#), just under 6,000 Vermonters died each year between 2015 – [2019](#). However, in [2020](#) there were 505 additional deaths, only 144 of which were attributed to Covid-19. In [2021](#) the number rose to 924 excess deaths, and in [2022](#) another 1,016 more people died than in 2019.

In [2023](#), the most recent data available, the number decreased to 815 more deaths than in 2019- a slightly downward trend, but still well above pre-Covid levels.

When asked [Vermont Edition](#) to explain whether a cost/benefit analysis is being conducted to assess and account for the unprecedented increase in deaths since 2020, Dr. Levine suggested that our state's population is too small and therefore our data is not statistically significant.

In March of 2020 a single Covid death in Vermont was significant enough to close schools, businesses and state offices- closures which lasted for weeks, months and years. Yet today 3,000 excess deaths are too few to count?

Dr. Levine also explained that the excess deaths are among older adults with comorbidities. Governor Scott, when asked about this same issue, also suggested the increase was due to more seniors moving to Vermont over the past few years. Yet, these explanations do not explain why deaths of infants, children and working-age adults have also starkly risen.



Or, why the death rate has been simultaneously rising in [all categories](#) and [in all age groups](#) across the country since 2020, especially among [working-age young adults](#). While they do seem to be decreasing, finally, according to the latest figures, death rates [still have not returned to pre-pandemic levels](#).

The increase in deaths is only the tip of the iceberg. We are also failing in all of our health outcomes, across the board. Schools and businesses have struggled to find enough staff who are healthy and able to work, and health facilities are flooded with patients.

Correlation is not causation, but clearly something has impacted our health in the past 5 years. Is it possible that the counter-measures suggested, implemented and enforced by our Health Department, based upon guidance from the CDC, caused more harm than good?

Personally, I would like to see the public included in choosing the next health commissioner. I'd like to see one chosen who is willing and able to hear from the public on questions of health policy, to review the benefits and costs of measures taken in the past, and give more consideration to high-quality research, open debate and personal choice when making policies in the future.

We have an opportunity here to improve the health of our government and its relationship with the people it serves.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Amy Hornblas
Evidence-Based Health Educator
Director of [Vermont Stands Up](#)