



Message from the Secretary

The month of February is devoted to matters of the heart – with Valentine’s Day being the most widely recognized observance. However, the entire month of February is designated as Heart Health Month, when everyone should focus on improving and maintaining the health of their hearts.

Heart disease is a major problem in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women. Every year, about 715,000 Americans have a heart attack and

approximately 600,000 people die from heart disease. And although heart disease can strike anyone, African-American men are at highest risk. Additionally, more than 40 percent of African-Americans in the U.S. have high blood pressure, which is one of the leading causes of heart disease.

These sobering statistics are the reason why I am encouraging all Pennsylvanians – especially African-Americans – to commit to making at least one change in their lives that will help lead to many more years of heart health.

The good news is that heart disease is preventable and controllable. Following these small steps will lead to a huge difference in your heart health:

- Schedule a visit with your health care provider to talk about your heart health. It’s very important to schedule regular check-ups – even if you’re not sick – and **ask questions**.
- Add exercise to your daily routine. Start by walking 15 minutes each day, three times a week.
- Increase healthy eating. Cook **heart-healthy meals** at home at least three times each week and cut down on the sodium.
- If you smoke, take steps to **quit**.
- Take your prescribed medicines – especially those for high blood pressure and cholesterol.

Please share this important information with your friends, family members and others in your community. Together, we can all take these simple steps to help prevent heart disease.

-Secretary of Health, Dr. Karen Murphy

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Zika Virus Protection

The best way to prevent Zika is to protect against mosquito bites when traveling to an affected area. This can be done by:

-  Using an insect repellent containing DEET
-  Wearing light-colored clothes that cover as much of the body as possible
-  Using physical barriers such as screens, closed doors and windows
-  Sleeping under mosquito nets

For more information on Zika virus, please visit: www.health.pa.gov



Zika Virus

Zika virus is primarily spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito and is most dangerous for pregnant women because of its apparent link to the birth defect, microcephaly. Transmission of the virus through sexual contact and blood transfusion has also been reported. Rarely, the virus is also spread from mother to child. Zika virus can cause fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). For those who are not pregnant, the illness is usually mild with symptoms lasting from several days to a week. Severe disease requiring hospitalization is uncommon. To find out more about this illness, please visit www.zika.pa.gov.



Lead Poisoning

National attention to the issue of **lead poisoning** has made some people wonder what Pennsylvania is doing to help eliminate the threat of lead in homes. The department takes the issue of lead exposure very seriously and we will continue to work with the Department of Environmental Protection and other relevant agencies on a coordinated response to address lead exposure across the commonwealth.

The Department of Health works with communities to reduce or eliminate the presence of lead or lead-related illnesses. For more information, visit www.health.pa.gov.

**PENNSYLVANIA
EBOLA
MONITORING
PROGRAM**

Pennsylvania Ebola Monitoring Program

For the past two years the department has provided **weekly updates** on the number of travelers arriving in Pennsylvania from Ebola-affected Western African countries who were being monitored for the Ebola virus. As of this month, the department will no longer be reporting these statistics. The number of travelers, and the risk of Ebola, has diminished to the point that reporting these numbers regularly is no longer necessary. This is considered a victory in public health, as medical professionals collectively worked to contain and treat this deadly disease.



Young Lungs at Play (YLAP)

One of the department's main goals is to promote healthy lifestyles for children and young adults to help set a foundation for a lifetime of good health. Ensuring that school-age Pennsylvanians have the option to play and have fun in smoke-free environments is essential to this mission.

The **YLAP** program was developed to help communities create tobacco-free parks, playgrounds and recreational areas for children. Many Pennsylvania communities have gone "tobacco-free" in outdoor areas. Public and private multi-unit housing developments have also joined YLAP to make their outdoor spaces tobacco-free.



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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



New Bureau of Epidemiology Director/State Epidemiologist

The Department welcomes Sharon Watkins, PhD, as our new director of the Bureau of Epidemiology and as the state epidemiologist. Under Dr. Watkins' leadership, the Bureau of Epidemiology is focused on the expansion of an environmental health program related to fracking, the development of a comprehensive program for the evaluation of health care-associated infections and the continued effort to help stem the heroin and prescription drug crisis in Pennsylvania.

Employee of the Month

The department is proud to announce our first Employee of the Month is Lori Diehl, Division director for the Division of Contracts in the Bureau of Administrative and Financial Services. Lori was nominated for her outstanding leadership and for being an innovator in the work place. Lori and her staff developed and implemented a more streamlined and efficient contracting process that has enabled the contract review process to transition from being paper driven to electronic, reducing costs and staff time.



We congratulate Lori on being named the first Department of Health Employee of the Month. We appreciate her hard work and contributions to the agency and the commonwealth.



Transforming Care Delivery

The department's own Deputy Secretary for Health Innovation Dr. Lauren Hughes is the lead author of an article that provides an overview of the work of the Stanford University Clinical Excellence Research Center (CERC) focusing on how health systems are transforming care delivery, particularly to meet the concerns of high-need, high-cost patients and other vulnerable populations. Dr. Hughes' article outlines the broad range of innovative initiatives to combat some of the most pressing health issues affecting Americans today. Read the full article [here](#).

100th Pennsylvania Farm Show



Pictured above are just a few of our employees who helped staff the Department of Health's booth at this year's Pennsylvania Farm Show. Whether it was providing flu vaccines, demonstrating "Hands-Only" CPR, or providing information on organ donation or WIC, we'd like to thank each of you for making this year's event a huge success.





IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



Data Collection Improvements

The Department of Health’s newly established Division of Health Informatics has released a new online self-service tool to be used by the public for accessing and analyzing public health data. The changes represent a broader initiative of the Wolf Administration to cultivate a more data-driven culture across the commonwealth to improve and streamline government effectiveness.

In response to growing demand from health data users across Pennsylvania, the initial launch of the new centralized portal named **EDDIE** (short for Enterprise Data Dissemination Informatics Exchange) features a dozen of the most frequently requested datasets, such as vital records and cancer incidence, now accessible using customizable, table data visualization.

Special
Pharmaceutical
Benefits
Program

Pilot Program to Provide Drug Coverage for Uninsured Pennsylvanians with Hepatitis C and HIV

The Special Pharmaceutical Benefits Program (SPBP) is implementing a **pilot program** offering no cost coverage of hepatitis C antiviral medications for individuals with a dual diagnosis of HIV and hepatitis C. This pilot program will be a collaboration between the Pennsylvania departments of Health and Aging.

The \$13 million, six-month program will be made available to hundreds of low-income Pennsylvanians with both hepatitis C and HIV. Providing drug coverage for individuals suffering from hepatitis C or HIV who couldn’t otherwise afford the proper medical treatments is a part of the department’s goal to ensure that every resident of the commonwealth has the ability to access needed medication.



Winter Weather Tips

The Department of Health provided important tips to help Pennsylvanians on both Facebook and Twitter during and after our historic winter storm. The department reminded residents affected by the weekend’s snow storm to follow some important tips to stay healthy and safe, particularly while removing snow in cold temperatures.



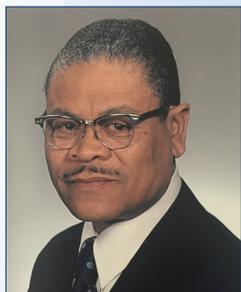
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DID YOU KNOW?



Black History Fact

Dr. John Finton Speller served as Pennsylvania's Secretary of Health from 1971 to 1975 under Governor Milton J. Shapp. Speller was the first African-American to hold this cabinet position.

Speller, a physician from Philadelphia, was a trail blazer for the advancement of African-Americans and medicine in the commonwealth. During his tenure as the department's secretary, legislation was passed that required life-saving immunizations for children entering school for the first time, as well as a list of required vaccines (diphtheria, tetanus, polio, measles and rubella).

Under his leadership, the department also recognized the Mr. Yuk symbol, created by the Children's Hospital Poison Control Center in Pittsburgh, as an effective poisoning prevention symbol.

This Black History Month we honor Dr. Speller for his leadership and service to the commonwealth.

Fun Fact

One theory of how the heart symbol became associated with love dates to the seventh century. While there are several theories on its origins, many people believe that it comes from the ancient African city-state of Cyrene, whose merchants traded in the rare, and now extinct, plant silphium. The plant was used to season food, but doubled as a contraceptive. A silphium seedpod looks like a human heart, so the shape became associated with romantic love and, of course, Valentine's Day.



Department of Health News from January

Did you know that copies of all press releases can be found on the department's website? Visit www.health.pa.gov.



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