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Issue 3

# PA HEALTH CONNECTION

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH E-NEWSLETTER | VOLUME 1



## Message from the Secretary

The month of March has ushered in warmer weather and spring will be upon us soon. For the Department of Health, this month signals some exciting changes for us as well.

I am happy to welcome **Meghna Patel** as the Director of the department's **Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP)**. Ms. Patel and her staff are beginning to lay the groundwork for an August launch of the program. They will ensure the PDMP meets its goal of assisting health care professionals in identifying patients that will benefit from treatment.

Work is underway on the department's strategic planning process. I am looking forward to sharing our vision with you this summer.

I recently spoke before the House and Senate Appropriations Committees regarding the Governor's proposed 2016-17 budget for the Department of Health. Our primary mission is to improve the health of all Pennsylvanians and we are hopeful that a budget is reached that addresses the structural deficit and allows the department to build on the progress made in the past year. I would like to thank all of the department's employees who provided information for the hearings.

We are continuing to move forward with Health Innovation. Governor Tom Wolf has led our efforts to engage more than 200 stakeholders to work on price and quality transparency, moving from volume to value payment in health care and rural health design. I encourage you to visit the **Innovation webpage** on [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov).

We are continuing to closely monitor the **Zika virus**. The Department of Health will be actively involved in the federal government's Zika Action Plan Summit scheduled for April. We will learn more about the federal government's recommendations to improve Zika preparedness and response across the country, including here in Pennsylvania.

And as you've heard, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf recently announced that he has an early, treatable form of **prostate cancer**. Our thoughts are with the governor and his family and we wish him well as he undergoes treatment for this disease.

-Secretary of Health, Dr. Karen Murphy

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## Zika Virus

Spring and summer are just around the corner, and so are mosquitos – some of which can spread diseases like the **Zika virus**. Although we continue to see confirmed cases of travel-acquired Zika virus in Pennsylvanians, the risk of contracting the virus in the commonwealth is extremely low.

The primary mosquito that carries the disease has not been found in the state. However, a related type of mosquito that can carry diseases similar to Zika has been found in southern and southeastern Pennsylvania. Mosquitos lay eggs in and near standing water in things like buckets, cans, ceramic pots, and discarded tires. Getting rid of these items will help reduce the mosquito population near your home. The DOH is working with multiple partners to ensure heightened monitoring and surveillance of this disease. Visit [www.zika.pa.gov](http://www.zika.pa.gov) to learn more about the virus.



## EMS Safety Initiative

The department's **Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (EMS)** staff is working with the Southern Alleghenies Regional EMS Council to implement a commonwealth-wide safety initiative for EMS agencies. This project will focus on several areas of safety concentration, such as how to manage violent encounters and proper lifting procedures to minimize back injuries, as well as the Federal Highway Administration's **National Traffic Incident Management Emergency Responder Training Program**. The initiative will be launched during EMS Week in May 2016 in memory of Pennsylvania paramedic Janice Keen-Livingston, who was killed on March 2, 2015, while working at the scene of a motor vehicle crash.



## 2016 Get Smart Competition for Young Artists and Writers

This month, the DOH will kick off its fourth annual **Get Smart children's art competition**, which is open to all kids 12 years and younger. The competition allows students to showcase their creativity and help spread the word about the importance of good hygiene habits, vaccinations and not over-using antibiotics.

Get Smart art competition submissions will be accepted from March 23 through Oct. 31, 2016. Contest winners will be announced during National Get Smart Week, Nov. 14 through Nov. 20, 2016. For information about entry rules and submissions, please visit [www.KnowWhenToSayNo.org](http://www.KnowWhenToSayNo.org).

## Epidemiology Public Health Seminar

### 2016 Public Health Seminars

The department's Bureau of Epidemiology hosts regular **public health seminars** on a variety of topics. These events are open to everyone and are available online via WebEx. Upcoming topics include: Antibiotic Resistance Threats Across Health Care Settings, Salmonella and Hepatitis C in Pennsylvania.

Special thanks to Nkuchia M. M'ikanatha, surveillance epidemiologist, and Connie Hocker, bureau secretary, for their work to organize and present these seminars.



## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

### DOH Employees Saved Lives by Administering Naloxone

Two DOH employees recently used the drug naloxone to save the lives of individuals who had overdosed. Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an overdose caused by an opioid drug like prescription pain medicine or heroin. We are very proud of both of these DOH employees. Congratulations to DOH lifesavers!



This past month, DOH Legislative Aide Will Freeman saved an individual's life by using naloxone. Will volunteers as an EMT and has been involved in EMS services for eight years.



Bureau of EMS Program Specialist Kevan Williams recently used naloxone to save two lives. Kevan is a U.S. Army veteran who has been involved with EMS work since 1975.



### DOH Employee of the Month for March

During the month of March, we recognize Penny Harris as our Employee of the Month.

Penny successfully drafted the DOH Ebola Concept of Operations Plan. By working with a variety of internal and external partners, Penny was able to outline an effective and efficient plan for how the commonwealth will respond to an Ebola emergency.

Additionally, Penny serves as one of the department's on-call emergency preparedness liaison officers. She has responded to three serious incidents this year: Winter Storm Jonas, the Feb. 9 ice storm and the Interstate 78 mass casualty accident. She provided excellent coordination efforts at the State Emergency Operations Center.

We thank Penny for her outstanding work!



### First Director of the State Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) Office

Meghna Patel, MHA, has been appointed as the first director of the state PDMP Office. In her role, Meghna will ensure the PDMP meets its goal of assisting health care professionals in identifying patients who would benefit from treatment.

Meghna will be responsible for developing and launching the PDMP online database that allows prescribers and dispensers of controlled substances to monitor who is obtaining opioids, who prescriptions are being obtained from, and how often they are prescribed.

Please welcome Meghna to the Department of Health!



## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



### Department of Health Continues Efforts to Improve Nursing Home Care in Pa.

Secretary of Health Dr. Karen Murphy met with nursing home industry stakeholders recently to provide an **update** on the department's efforts to improve nursing home care in Pennsylvania, highlight progress made to date and discuss next steps. Secretary Murphy also sought feedback from attendees to help guide future collaboration.

The department formed the Nursing Home Quality Improvement Task Force in August 2015. The task force includes nationally recognized experts in long-term care management who are charged with identifying ways the department can advance quality improvement in Pennsylvania's long-term care facilities. The task force meets monthly and will issue a comprehensive report with findings and recommendations this summer. Visit "Top Online Services" at [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov) to locate nursing care facilities or to make a complaint.

### Falls Prevention Programs

The Division of Health Risk Reduction administers two programs for older adults that promote falls prevention throughout the state. These two programs are the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths, and Injuries (STEADI) ToolKit and A Matter of Balance (MOB): Managing Concerns about Falls program. Currently, we partner with five county/municipal health departments (Allentown, Chester, Erie, Montgomery and York) and four regional tobacco primary contractors.

The CDC's toolkit contains resources and tools that help make fall prevention an integral part of clinical practice. This toolkit helps health care providers to identify patients' risk for a fall, identify modifiable risk factors and offer effective interventions. Find more information on the [CDC website](#).

### Wolf Administration Recognizes Police Departments, Individual Officers for Using Naloxone to Save Lives

The departments of Health and Drug and Alcohol Programs **recognized** hundreds of municipal police departments, the Pennsylvania State Police, and individual police officers who have reversed more than 600 opioid overdoses since the beginning of 2015.

The Wolf Administration will continue to work with district attorneys and local police departments to educate them on combatting the heroin and opioid overdose epidemic, raise awareness of available resources, and dispel the misperceptions about naloxone and broader social stigmas surrounding drug use. The hope is that these efforts will encourage a greater number of police departments to carry naloxone. For more information on naloxone, visit the department's Web page on [Opioid Abuse](#).

### March is Brain Injury Awareness Month

Ten million Americans are living with brain injury today. There are two types of brain injury: Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), resulting from a blow to the head or a fall, and non-traumatic Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), such as stroke, aneurism or the result of a tumor. TBI is the leading cause of disability and death among children and adolescents. Mild TBI, of which concussion is a form, is often under-diagnosed or misdiagnosed with symptoms not immediately apparent.

For more information on brain injury, including support services and tips for prevention, contact the [Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania](#).





## DID YOU KNOW?



### Women's History Month

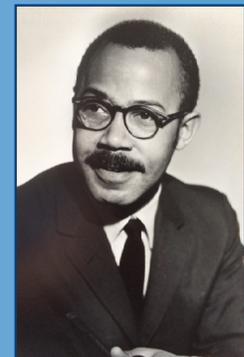
In honor of Women's History Month we recognize Dr. Edith MacBride-Dexter, the first female secretary of health. In 1935, MacBride-Dexter was appointed by Governor Howard Earle as only the fifth head of the agency.

At a time when very few women entered the medical field, MacBride-Dexter obtained a medical degree from the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia. Before her appointment, she worked as an ophthalmologist in Sharon for 16 years.

During her four-year tenure, Dr. MacBride-Dexter was instrumental in the development of the first statewide diabetes and cancer control plans. Our current secretary, Dr. Karen Murphy, is only the second woman to hold the post since the agency's founding in 1905.

### Correction

Last month we incorrectly identified Dr. John Finton Speller as Pennsylvania's first black secretary of health. In fact, Dr. Thomas W. Georges, Jr. was the first African-American to serve in this role. Georges was appointed by Governor Raymond P. Shafer in 1967 and served until 1970. Under Georges' leadership, the agency launched an "End Measles" campaign which resulted in 4,700 children being vaccinated in 1967, seven times the number of the prior year. Georges also led the expansion of the Migrant Health Program, which still focuses today on improving emergency health services, coordinating and expanding home health services, and providing comprehensive dental care to all children in rural areas.



### Fun Fact

Springtime really is good for your health!

All those months of darker days in winter sap us of vitamin-D rich sunshine and put a damper on our spirits. More sun means more vitamin D, an important nutrient for bones and healthy immune systems, muscles and nerve function. Extra sunshine also may help reduce seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression that some people experience during dreary winter months.

Before heading outside to soak up the sun remember to protect yourself with a high SPF lotion.



### Department of Health News from February

Did you know that copies of all press releases can be found on the department's website? Visit [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov).

