



# PA Health Connection

Pennsylvania Department of Health

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Secretary Murphy and John Collins discuss updates to the Pa. Medical Marijuana Program at a briefing in Oct.

## Message from the Secretary



With flu season upon us, now is the time to get a flu shot if you haven't already. It takes just seconds, but getting a flu shot is one of the most important steps you can take to protect yourself from influenza.

For all of us, getting the flu not only means possibly getting sick with fever and aches, but often respiratory infections as well. Although rare, even healthy people can be hospitalized and die from flu complications. It also means time away from work, your family and your life while you recover.

Getting the flu means possibly spreading the illness to our most sensitive populations: the very young, older people, pregnant women and those with pre-existing medical conditions. For them,

influenza can be dangerous and even deadly.

Remember, the single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated every year. Through vaccination and other prevention methods, we can all work together to protect the lives of others, especially those with weakened immune systems and those who cannot get a flu vaccine.

I invite you to visit the website [www.flufreepa.com](http://www.flufreepa.com), where you can find up-to-date information on flu prevention, immunization clinics and state flu statistics.

Best,

-Karen

## Public Health 3.0 Echo Event Held in Fayette County

The first Pennsylvania Public Health 3.0 Echo Event was held on Oct. 18 in Fayette County. This initiative encourages collaborations across communities and sectors to help improve all aspects of public health including:

- Economic development;
- Education;
- Transportation;
- Food;
- Environment;
- Housing; and
- Safe neighborhoods.

In April, Secretary Murphy joined Acting U.S. Assistant Secretary for Health Dr. Karen DeSalvo and Allegheny County Health Department Director Dr. Karen Hacker in Pittsburgh for the first of five national listening-sessions for Public Health 3.0.

The Fayette County event was the first of five to be held across the commonwealth to promote Public Health 3.0. Other events are slated for Blair, Cambria, Greene and Indiana counties. Three more events are scheduled for early 2017 in central, northeast and southeast Pa.



Dr. Loren Robinson speaking at Public Health 3.0 in Fayette County.

## Update on Medical Marijuana Program Implementation in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's Medical Marijuana Program continues to take shape. DOH's Medical Marijuana staff have been working with stakeholders and legislators to develop a patient-focused program that meets the needs of Pennsylvanians with serious medical conditions.

Here are the latest program updates:

- The temporary regulations for marijuana growers and processors under Act 16 were published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin on Oct. 29. The regulations outline the financial, legal and operational requirements needed by an individual to be considered for a grower/processor permit, as well as where the facilities can be located.
- The next Physician Workgroup on medical marijuana will meet on Nov. 28. The involvement of physicians and health care

professionals through our Physician Workgroup is vital to the successful development and implementation of Pennsylvania's Medical Marijuana Program.

- A new [patient survey](#) is available on our website. We will be accepting feedback until Nov. 18 from individuals eligible for the program, as well as their caretakers. Their input is vital to ensuring that the Medical Marijuana Program remains patient-focused.

Questions about the Medical Marijuana Program can be emailed to [RA-DHMedMarijuana@pa.gov](mailto:RA-DHMedMarijuana@pa.gov).

## First-Ever Conference on Stopping Sepsis Infections at Medical Facilities

Last month, we brought together more than 200 health care leaders from across the commonwealth for the first-of-its-kind Stopping Sepsis: Saving Lives in Pennsylvania Conference. The conference was the largest single gathering of chief medical, nursing and quality officers for hospitals in the commonwealth.

Sepsis is a life-threatening complication that took the lives of more than 9,000 Pennsylvanians last year. It is triggered by an infection and can be acquired both in the

community and in health care facilities. Anyone can develop sepsis, however it is most common and hazardous in older adults and individuals with weakened immune systems.

To learn more about how the department is working with community leaders to stop sepsis in Pennsylvania or to review causes and symptoms of the infection, please visit [sepsis.health.pa.gov](http://sepsis.health.pa.gov).

## Narcan Distributed to Public High Schools

Last month, Secretary Murphy spoke to students at Northeastern High School in York County about how they can help fight the opioid epidemic. She also applauded school administrators and the school nurses for taking advantage of a free program offered through DOH to provide Narcan to every public high school in the state. Thanks to a partnership between DOH and Adapt Pharma, 128 public high schools in Pennsylvania received this [life-saving drug](#).

Each of the schools that chose to receive Narcan

were provided with two doses. Narcan reverses the effects of opioid overdoses and can be used to save the life of anyone who may suffer an overdose on school property.

The purpose of this outreach is to give a second chance at life to young people who may be struggling with addiction. Find out more about how the department is fighting the opioid epidemic in Pennsylvania by visiting our [opioid abuse web page](#).



Secretary Murphy discussed the opioid crisis with students at Northeastern High School in York County.

## Prescription Drug Monitoring Program to Name its "Champions"

To take advantage of peer-to-peer influence within the medical professional community, the Pennsylvania [Prescription Drug Monitoring Program](#) Office (PDMP) is developing a "Champions" Program.

This program will engage Pennsylvania health professionals who are advocates for the new PA PDMP to educate their colleagues in the field on the purpose, use and benefits of the system.

The PDMP Champions will serve as leaders for this initiative within their medical communities and work

to grow understanding, registration and user base of the system, recruit other Champions to educate their own networks, and ultimately multiply the positive effect of the PDMP on opioid and heroin abuse in the commonwealth.

To date, more than 50,000 prescribers and their designees are registered in the PDMP.

For updates on how to get involved with the Champions Program when it launches, visit our [PDMP webpage](#).

## New School Immunization Regulations Finalized

The Independent Regulatory Review Commission unanimously voted to approve changes to Pennsylvania's immunization regulations to reduce the eight-month provisional period for school immunizations to five days. The final regulations are expected to be published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin in March 2017 and may go into effect at that time or shortly after.

The previous eight-month provisional window for immunizations presented a very real risk for children to become infected and potentially

spread preventable, communicable diseases to others. Ensuring children have a medically-appropriate path to being fully immunized will go a long way toward accomplishing the goal of keeping our kids healthy.

Vaccines should be part of a child's regular school physical before they enter kindergarten and seventh grade. Vaccine clinics are also being held across the commonwealth for children who are uninsured or underinsured. More information is available at [www.dontwaitvaccinate.pa.gov](http://www.dontwaitvaccinate.pa.gov).



## Investigation Initiated on 20 Cases of Bacterial Infection Potentially Linked to Prefilled Saline Flush Syringes

DOH has identified 20 cases of *Burkholderia cepacia* (B. cepacia) in Pennsylvania residents that may be linked to prefilled saline flush syringes. We are working with other state and federal agencies to investigate the multi-state outbreak and looking into possible additional cases.

Although investigators have been unable to pinpoint the exact source of these illnesses, each patient resided in a facility using prefilled syringes of saline

flush made by Nurse Assist, a Haltom City, Texas production facility.

DOH tested a sample of these syringes and identified contamination with B. cepacia. All facilities known to have received this product have been notified and have discontinued use. The department is working to identify if any other facilities are using Nurse Assist prefilled saline flushes.

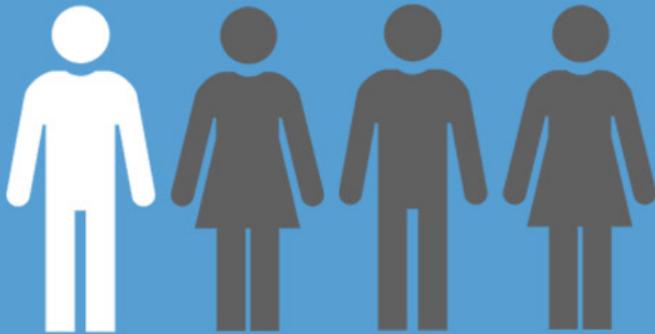
## November is American Diabetes Month

Diabetes is one of the most common causes of disability or deaths for adults in the country. This disease affects more than 29 million people, or roughly one in every 11 people.

Thankfully, there are many ways to prevent diabetes or help those who have it control their condition. Proper diet and exercise can drastically reduce a person's chances of getting diabetes and

can help those with diabetes live a healthier life.

We offer several programs which provide [education and resources](#) on diabetes for people of all ages, including [school children](#). November is American Diabetes Month, and we encourage you to find out more about this disease and how you can protect yourself.



# 1 in 4

29 million Americans have diabetes.  
1 in 4 don't know it.

## November is Prematurity Awareness Month

Premature birth is when a baby is born too early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Babies born prematurely may have more health issues or need to stay in the hospital longer than babies born later. Each year in the United States, about 1 in 10 babies is born prematurely.

In Pennsylvania, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program helps pregnant women learn about good nutrition to keep themselves and their families healthy. WIC provides nutrition services, breastfeeding support, and more to expectant and new mothers to ensure the health of their baby.

You can find out more about [WIC on their webpage](#) or by calling 1-800-WIC-WINS.



## New Press Secretary

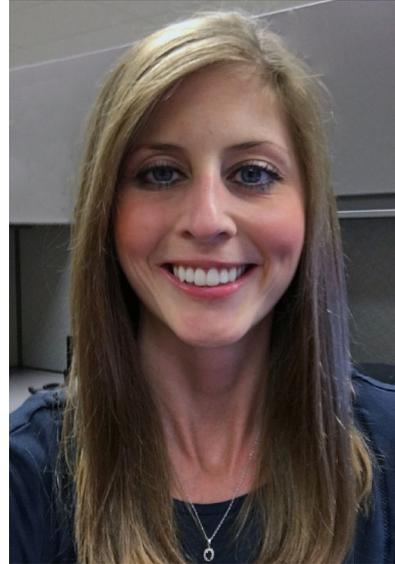


April Hutcheson is the new Press Secretary for the Office of Communications. She will be working with media outlets across the commonwealth to provide access to and information about department activities and programs.

A Philadelphia native, April holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and a

master's degree in journalism from Temple University. She is an experienced media relations expert with a vast experience in crisis communications and public relations, as well as helping non-profit organizations increase awareness to build member and donor bases.

## New Digital Director



Tara Immel is the new Digital Director in the Office of Communications. She will be developing and enhancing the department's digital/ social media and online marketing presence.

Tara holds a bachelor of arts degree in communication from the University of Pittsburgh. A life-long Pennsylvania resident, she has

worked her way across the state gaining experience in industry and higher education. Most recently, she was the marketing manager for the Eberly College of Science at Penn State University in State College.

## New Emergency Preparedness Public Information Officer



Nate Wardle has joined the Department of Health as our new Emergency Preparedness Public Information Officer with the Bureau of Public Health Preparedness.

Nate has a Bachelor of Science in Meteorology from Millersville University and Master of Science in Emergency Management from Millersville University. Nate will be working on developing and

enhancing the department's communication in regards to our emergency management efforts.

Most recently, he was the assignment manager at CBS 21 News in Harrisburg.

## Kimberly Fitzpatrick from the Bureau of Communicable Diseases



The department recognizes Kimberly Fitzpatrick who was instrumental in the development of a tuberculosis testing policy and video direct observed therapy plan. Kimberly made both documents with input from areas throughout the department. Her communications skills and tenacity made these projects a reality.

## Stay Healthy During the Holiday Season

Thanksgiving is a unique holiday in North America, but it is actually based on English celebrations from the Protestant Reformation revolving around harvest festivals and fall-time celebrations.

This can be a time of year when many people overindulge in candies and unhealthy food. If you would like to know how much is too much, visit our [nutrition webpage](#) to learn about proper portion sizes and better eating tips.

Research shows that good nutrition lowers people's risk for many chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, some types of cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis. Good nutrition is also necessary for healthy development and growth in children and adolescents. You can have fun and stay healthy during this exciting holiday season!

### Staying Healthy Tips for the Holidays

#### Everything in Moderation

Fill your plate with smaller portions to avoid overindulging.



#### Avoid Empty Calories

Make choices like water or low-calorie drinks instead of soda or alcohol.



#### Get Moving

Any movement counts! Enjoy a walk with family and friends.



#### Get Plenty of Sleep

Getting sufficient sleep is necessary to stay healthy.



#### Wash Your Hands

Reduce the spread of germs by washing properly.



#### Manage Stress

Balance work, home and play. Take time to relax!



## Healthy Corner Store Initiative

The department is committed to increasing access to healthy food and beverage options for Pennsylvanians. As part of this mission, we partner with retailers on the [Pennsylvania Healthy Corner Store Initiative](#) (HCSI). This initiative connects

store owners with resources to increase availability of healthy foods in corner stores and offer consumers fresher, nutritious food options.

Currently, more than 50 corner stores are participating in HCSI.

Corner stores play a critical role in the health of many families. By working together, we can make the healthy choice the easy accessible choice and ultimately improve the overall health of Pennsylvanians.

## Department of Health News Available Online

All DOH press releases can be found on the department's website! Visit: [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov).

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