



PA Health Connection

Pennsylvania Department of Health

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Dr. Lauren Hughes discusses the PA Prescription Drug Monitoring Program at UPenn in Philadelphia.

Message from the Secretary



Greetings everyone,

Earlier this month we released the recommendations of the Nursing Home Quality Improvement Task Force. These task force recommendations will change how nursing homes function and improve the quality of life for all residents. In addition,

we launched a new campaign demonstrating our commitment to improving the quality of care received. The campaign, “Speak up. We’re listening,” lets nursing home residents and their families know they have a safe place to raise their concerns. Lastly, we redesigned the nursing home portion of its website to make it easier to find important information. For more information on the task force report and Pennsylvania nursing homes, visit nursinghomes.health.pa.gov.

As part of our commitment to provide for the public’s health, the department continues to combat the prescription opioid epidemic, the worst epidemic I have seen in my professional career. To help combat this crisis, our revised [Prescription Drug Monitoring Program](#) (PDMP) gives health care providers a cutting-

edge tool to work with one another to identify opioid-drug seekers and get them the help they need. We strongly encourage prescribers and dispensers to register to use the PDMP and stand with us to turn the tide of the prescription opioid abuse crisis in Pennsylvania.

We also continue our daily work on the implementation of Pennsylvania’s medical marijuana program. At the beginning of September, we closed our input period for public comment on the temporary regulations for growers and processors. The feedback we have reviewed thus far has been invaluable, and I thank everyone who submitted their thoughts to us. We are working with our partners in the legislature to ensure that the program is fully implemented by early 2018, allowing individuals who suffer from serious medical conditions to receive the medical treatment they need.

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter for this month. The Department of Health is committed to serving you better. If you have any questions or comments for us, please call 1-877-PA-HEALTH (724-3258).

Best,
Karen

State Health Improvement Plan

The department recently published the [Pennsylvania State Health Improvement Plan 2015-2020](#) (SHIP) on its website. The plan will guide communities and the state in achieving measurable health status improvements for residents by implementing these critical strategic initiatives over the next five years.

Public health system stakeholders, community health organizations, and health experts from throughout the state are coordinating with DOH staff to support the SHIP implementation across the commonwealth.

For more information, visit the [State Health Improvement Plan webpage](#).

Pennsylvania Implementing TRAIN PA

On Oct. 1, 2016, Pennsylvania became the 26th state in the country to implement TrainingFinder Realtime Affiliate Integrated Network (TRAIN), a web-based system that provides public health online learning to end users free of charge.

TRAIN PA provides web-based training programs provided by other state departments of health, academic institutions and non-profit organizations. TRAIN PA also provides Pennsylvania-specific learning content for professionals who protect or enhance the public's health. Users will include commonwealth staff, emergency medical service providers, emergency management organizations, county and municipal health department staff and many others.

For more information about TRAIN PA, please contact [Tim Pollock](#), TRAIN PA project manager at the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Training Center.

Pennsylvania Zika Virus Response Plan

The department has distributed [Prevention Kits for Pregnant Women](#) statewide to provide education about the virus. The kits are available free of charge to pregnant women and can be obtained locally at health departments, federally qualified health centers, community health centers, WIC offices and other non-profit organizations that service women who are either low-income or homeless.

These kits are especially prudent since Pennsylvania recorded its first case of sexually-transmitted Zika virus

last month. If you have traveled to an area where Zika virus is present, use condoms or other barrier protection methods during sex for eight weeks upon return in order to prevent sexual transmission. Women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant should discuss with their doctors any travel plans to Zika-affected locations.

For more information on what the department is doing to keep Pennsylvanians safe from the Zika virus, please visit our [Zika Virus webpage](#).



Leadership from the Departments of Health & Environmental Protection participated in a Zika tabletop exercise.

2016 Influenza Season Preparation

The 2016 influenza (flu) season is rapidly approaching and now is the time to plan to get a flu vaccine rather than the nasal mist. The DOH recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older as the first and most important step in protecting against influenza and its life-threatening complications.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found the nasal flu

vaccines, live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV), to be ineffective for this year's flu strains. This does not mean the nasal spray will be ineffective in future flu seasons.

DOH hosts the website www.flufreepa.com, where you can find up-to-date information on flu prevention, immunization availability and state flu statistics.

Physician General Dr. Rachel Levine Highlights Need for Nondiscrimination Legislation in Durham, North Carolina

On Sept. 8, Dr. Rachel Levine spoke at the Veritas Collaborative Symposium on Eating Disorders at the Durham Convention Center in Durham, North Carolina. During her time there, Dr. Levine also took time to speak about the importance of nondiscrimination policies and legislation.

Pennsylvanians can still be fired or denied housing and public accommodation because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. In April of this year, Governor Tom Wolf signed [two executive orders](#) that expanded protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression or identity for state employees and, for the first time, employees of contractors doing business with the commonwealth.

The next step in Pennsylvania – and nationally – is to pass comprehensive non-discrimination legislation to ensure everyone has equal protection under the law.

Dr. Rachel Levine speaking at the Veritas Collaborative Symposium on Eating Disorders in Durham, North Carolina on Sept. 8.



Credit: Dr. Rachel Levine

State Police and Department of Health Sign Agreement to Streamline Sexual Assault Evidence Procedures

The Department of Health recently signed an agreement with the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) to maximize state resources to locate rape kit backlogs and give local forensic laboratories protocols from a criminal laboratory.

While both departments work to implement this agreement, the DOH has already taken several proactive steps to deal with the backlog:

- DOH has worked with the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association, the Pennsylvania Coalition on Rape (PCAR) and PSP to communicate the new reporting requirements under Act 27 to local police departments, as well as reaching out to them individually.
- DOH contacted police departments to collect an inventory of backlogged rape kits and kits in their possession and made the necessary reporting forms available on its website, as well as published a notice of the reporting requirement in the Pennsylvania Bulletin.
- DOH has conducted free training sessions regarding Act 27 across the state open to all state and local law enforcement agencies.
- DOH and PSP have also worked with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape to determine whether additional standards for laboratories are required.

Decorative Lenses Warning for Halloween

Dressing in costume for Halloween is a tradition that many people enjoy. However, having a great outfit doesn't mean you should ever put your health at risk, which is what you're doing if you use unfitted or decorative contact lenses.

Any contact lenses that have not been prescribed to you by your doctor could cause blindness,

infections, allergic reactions or even the loss of an eye. If you would like to report businesses other than practitioners that are distributing contact lenses without a prescription, please call the Department of Health at 1-800-822-2113. Not only are unfitted contacts dangerous, they are illegal. Help keep everyone safe this holiday season by keeping these illicit lenses from hurting unsuspecting consumers.



October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of death among women. Every year, the DOH takes the month of October to remember those we have lost to this disease as well as remind people of preventive measures to protect themselves and their loved ones.

The Department of Health's HealthyWoman Program is a free breast and cervical cancer early detection program.

Free services for those meeting the eligibility

standards include:

- Clinical breast examination;
- Mammogram;
- Pelvic examination and Pap smear;
- Education on breast self-exam; and
- Follow-up diagnostic care for an abnormal result.

Please visit the [HealthyWoman Program webpage](#) to find out more information regarding the educational resources and wellness services that may be available to you.



New Deputy Secretary for Health Planning and Assessment



Raphael (Ray) M. Barishansky is the new deputy secretary for Health Planning and Assessment. Ray brings to us experience in large governmental agencies as well as in writing, developing and testing realistic operational emergency plans and

interacting with all levels of emergency services personnel in both the private and public sector.

New Director for the Bureau of Health Statistics and Registries



Audrey Marrocco is the new director for the Bureau of Health Statistics and Registries. She comes to DOH from the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, where she managed administrative services, implemented business process improvements and refined reporting requirements.

New Director for the Office of Medical Marijuana



John Collins joined the Department of Health in April. His experience in a heavily regulated medical enterprise, market research and new product development, strategic planning, logistics, communications and customer service is a perfect fit for the

requirements of overseeing the implementation of Pennsylvania's Medical Marijuana Program.

Jenn Spence from the Bureau of Facility Licensure and Certification



We recognize Jenn Spence, whose unfailing positive and helpful support to everyone at the Jackson Center Office demonstrates the behavior and values that are expected of all Quality Assurance employees.

Melisa Rader from the Bureau of Informatics and Information



This past year, Melisa Rader was asked to take over the DOH Intranet conversion project. Melisa not only helped create a better intranet site for the department but it was on budget and delivered early. There are several new features on the new intranet that

enhances the user experience including a rotating banner highlighting new content and an interactive organizational chart.

Beth Beam from the Bureau of Public Health Preparedness



Beth was instrumental in acquiring TRAIN, a new system improving the return of investment and superior advances relative to online and blended learning environments. This program provides savings of approximately \$2.8 million over a

five-year period for the commonwealth, access to a network with 30 other public health affiliates, courses in multiple disciplines, best practices and pathway to accreditation.

Health Fact

According to the CDC, 18 million courses of antibiotics are prescribed for the common cold in the United States every year. Research shows that colds are caused by viruses. Therefore, millions of unnecessary antibiotics are prescribed for viral respiratory infections.

The Department of Health maintains the [Get Smart About Antibiotic Resistance Program](#) which aims to address the rampant over-prescribing practices of practitioners. This program encourages youth and parental awareness as to when antibiotics are and are not necessary. It also outlines good preventative practices for health.

Program initiatives include:

- Educating parents as to the symptoms that indicate a need for antibiotics and which do not;
- Arming pharmacy students with knowledge about antibiotic resistance to disseminate to the community; and
- Increasing vaccination rates among all members in communities.



Credit: Centers for Disease Control

Department of Health News Available Online

All DOH press releases can be found on the department's website! Visit: www.health.pa.gov.

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