



PA Health Connection

Pennsylvania Department of Health

IN THIS ISSUE

- Message from the Secretary.. 1
- Holiday Wish Program..... 2
- Medical Marijuana 2
- PDMP..... 2
- Zika 3
- Cold Weather Tips..... 3
- Farm Show..... 4
- Get Smart Week. 5
- Great American Smokeout 5
- Flu Clinics 5
- Telehealth 6
- World AIDS Day..... 6
- World Diabetes Day 6
- DOH News Online..... 6
- Social Media 6



Staff from the Office of Medical Marijuana met with patients suffering from sickle cell anemia, epilepsy, autism and cancer to understand how to best serve their needs. DOH staff included: John Collins, director of Office of Medical Marijuana; Sunny Podolak, assistant director of Office of Medical Marijuana; Larry Clark, deputy director of policy and operations; and Lolly Bentch, patient liaison.

Message from the Secretary



As 2016 draws to a close, I want to take this opportunity to thank each of you for the contributions you've made to improve the health of all Pennsylvanians. I am reminded daily of your commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of the nearly 13 million

people who call Pennsylvania home. I thank you for your continued dedication.

My hope is that you have time to enjoy the holiday season with coworkers, friends and family.

Warmest wishes to you and your family for a safe, healthy and happy holiday season. Looking forward to our continued work together in 2017.

Karen



Holiday Wish Program

The Holiday Wish Program is an annual charity drive that pairs commonwealth employees with the National Guard to provide holiday gifts to families in need. Every year, groups of our employees volunteer to sponsor families chosen by county assistance offices, local services centers, senior centers, and the National Guard. The employee groups then provide toys, clothing, supplies and any other gifts requested by the families.



This year, the Department of Health is sponsoring 22 families. All of the gifts from each agency will be arranged and presented in the lobby of the Keystone Building on Dec. 7 in a festive ceremony led by Governor Wolf. It's a day filled with smiles and good cheer, and remains an essential part of the holiday season here at the Department of Health.



Secretary Murphy and Governor Wolf at the 2015 Holiday Wish festivities.

Medical Marijuana Program

November showed more progress for our Medical Marijuana Program. Public input was sought for laboratories and potential patients of the program. Comment periods serve two vital roles to the program: first, they allow us to identify potential issues that the diverse perspectives of the public can recognize; and second, they demonstrate a commitment to transparency and patient focus for the medically-centered program.

The Medical Marijuana Program was signed into law by Governor Tom Wolf on April 17, 2016. Since that time, the department has:

- Completed the Safe Harbor temporary guidelines and Safe Harbor Letter application process, as well as approved 120 applications to date;

Prescription Drug Monitoring Program

The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) will play an important role in the battle against the opioid epidemic. As of November, the PDMP has registered over 58,000 users – which means those physicians and health professionals are making sure prescription opioids are being prescribed safely and responsibly.

Recent legislation signed by Governor Wolf has strengthened the PDMP program by requiring prescribers to query the database each time an opioid is prescribed.

- Released public surveys to aid in the development of temporary regulations for growers/processors and dispensaries/laboratories;

- Convened the Medical Marijuana Physician Workgroup; and

- Released a Request for Information for Information Technology solutions for operations of medical marijuana program.

Full implementation of the program is to be completed in 2018. The program will provide access to medical marijuana for patients who are Pennsylvania residents under a physician's care for the treatment of a serious medical condition as defined by Act 16.

The legislation also requires health professionals to update the database within 24 hours, rather than the 72-hour window previously established.

More info about the PDMP can be found on our [website](#).

Zika Virus

Although the chilly weather means the threat of acquiring the Zika virus from Pennsylvania mosquitoes is gone for the season, we're not in the clear from the virus. Zika can still be acquired from mosquitoes while traveling to warmer, Zika-affected areas. Also, if some is infected, he or she can still spread the virus through sexual contact.

The best ways to prevent Zika virus infection are to take extra steps to protect yourself when visiting a Zika-affected area, avoid sexual contact with a partner who traveled to a Zika-affected area, or use a condom every time. The CDC recommends that all pregnant women consider postponing travel to areas where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. More information about Zika can be found on our [website](#).

Cold Weather Tips

As we enter December, we also enter the beginning of snow season, which means it is time to start preparing for potentially dangerous winter weather. The CDC provides an [excellent guide](#) on how to prepare yourself, your vehicle and your house. It also provides ways to recognize and prevent frostbite and hypothermia. Remember, when it comes to winter preparedness, don't get caught in the cold.

Farm Show

The Department of Health is preparing for its annual booth at the Pennsylvania Farm Show, which will be held this year from Jan. 7 through Jan. 14, 2017. As in previous years, the booth will offer free flu shots to the public, as well as many other attractions like hands-only CPR and naloxone demonstrations. The booth is staffed by Department of Health volunteers, and the flu shots are provided through partnership with Penn State Hershey. We encourage everyone planning to visit the show with their friends and family to stop by our booth!

TOP 5 THINGS EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ZIKA

1



Zika primarily spreads through infected mosquitoes. You can also get Zika through sex.

Many areas in the United States have the type of mosquitoes that can spread Zika virus. These mosquitoes are aggressive daytime biters and can also bite at night. Also, Zika can be passed through sex from a person who has Zika to his or her sex partners.

2

The best way to prevent Zika is to prevent mosquito bites.

- Use insect repellent. It works!
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Stay in places with air conditioning or window and door screens.
- Remove standing water around your home.



3



Zika is linked to birth defects.

Zika infection during pregnancy can cause a serious birth defect called microcephaly that is a sign of incomplete brain development. If you have a partner who lives in or has traveled to an area with Zika, do not have sex, or use condoms every time you have sex during your pregnancy.

4

Pregnant women should not travel to areas with Zika.

If you must travel to one of these areas, talk to your healthcare provider first and strictly follow steps to prevent mosquito bites during your trip.



5



Returning travelers infected with Zika can spread the virus through mosquito bites.

If you get infected with Zika and a mosquito bites you, you can pass the virus to the mosquito. The infected mosquito bites other people, who get infected. Returning travelers should also use condoms or not have sex if they are concerned about passing it to their partners through sex.

Get Smart About Antibiotics Week

The Department of Health worked with Pennsylvania's Get Smart program to conduct the fourth annual statewide Get Smart Art Competition in observance of Get Smart About Antibiotics Week, which was held the week of Nov. 14. The competition gave children the opportunity to showcase their creativity and help spread the word about the importance of hand hygiene, vaccines and appropriate antibiotic use.

In addition to announcing the winners, Physician General Dr. Rachel Levine read the children's book "Katie Caught a Cold" to

a classroom of preschool children to teach them how healthy habits prevent the spread of germs. She followed it with a handwashing demonstration that uses Glo-Germ gel to simulate how germs spread.

Every year, as many as 10 million children in the United States are at risk for harmful side effects from antibiotics prescribed for viral illnesses, which are not cured by antibiotics. The overuse of antibiotics contributes to the rise in antibiotic resistance, which results in at least 23,000 preventable deaths in the United States annually.



Dr. Levine reading "Katie Caught a Cold" to a group of preschoolers in Pittsburgh during a Get Smart Week event.

Great American Smokeout

November 17 marked the Great American Smokeout, a national anti-smoking effort sponsored by the American Cancer Society. To mark the occasion, our Young Lungs at Play program held an event to promote smoke-free playgrounds across the commonwealth. The mission of Young Lungs at Play is to help communities create tobacco-free parks, playgrounds and recreational areas for children.

The annual event encourages smokers to make a plan to quit smoking. Smoking remains the single largest cause of preventable disease and death in the United States. However, more than 42 million Americans still smoke cigarettes, according to the American Cancer

Society. Tobacco use causes more deaths each year than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide and illegal drugs combined. For help on quitting, please call the Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or 1-855-DEJELO-YA (1-855-335-3569).



Flu Clinics

As part of our Stopping the Flu Starts with YOU campaign, the Department of Health is hosting a series of flu clinics across the commonwealth in December. Flu vaccines are the easiest and most effective way to avoid the flu during the dangerous flu season, which runs through the end of winter. The vaccines are being offered at little to no cost for uninsured and underinsured adults and children.

Additionally, December marks two important weeklong dedications: National Vaccination Week and National Handwashing Week, both occurring during the week of December 4-10. Vaccination, handwashing, and various other preventive measures are crucial ways to keep yourself, your coworkers, and your family healthy. View the many steps you can take to prevent the flu on our [flu web site](#).



Dr. Murphy received her flu vaccination at the Stopping the Flu Starts With YOU campaign kickoff at Penn State Hershey Medical Center.

Telehealth

On November 10, Secretary Murphy convened the Telehealth Advisory Committee to discuss the use of cutting edge technology to reach medically-underserved residents in Pennsylvania, especially in rural areas.

Telehealth uses technologies like videoconferencing, the internet, digital documentation, streaming media and wireless communications to support long-distance clinical health care, health-related education, public health and health administration.

Pennsylvania has the third-largest rural population

in the nation. Rural residents face very limited access to care due to the low concentration of providers in those areas. Telehealth, which increases access to care, alleviates travel costs and allows more convenient treatment and monitoring of chronic conditions.

Using telehealth to improve services for rural Pennsylvanians is part of The Governor's Office of Transformation, Innovation, Management and Efficiency (GO-TIME) initiative, which works to modernize government operations in order to reduce costs and improve services.

World AIDS Day

On December 1, the Department of Health will join the global community in recognition of World AIDS Day. More than 35 million people have died from the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), making it one of the most destructive epidemics in history. Here in Pennsylvania, 59,559 people have been diagnosed with HIV since 1980.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all adolescents and adults get tested at least once for HIV as a routine part of medical care, and that gay and bisexual men and others at high risk be tested more frequently. The Department of Health encourages everyone to take a leadership role and commit to being tested for HIV in order to reduce its global spread.

World Diabetes Day

In recognition of World Diabetes Day on Nov. 14 and Diabetes Awareness Month, the Department of Health partnered with Pinnacle Health to offer free health screenings for cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure in the Capitol Rotunda. Local chefs also shared healthy recipes with free samples to all attendees.



Executive Deputy Secretary Corey Coleman completed several health screenings at the event.

The event, which also came together through partnership from Sanofi, Novo Nordisk and other health care organizations, focused on providing the public with prevention tips and ways people can take control of their health.

Department of Health News Available Online

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

Like DOH on Facebook Follow DOH on Twitter

Get the latest health news, updates and events on our social media pages!



facebook.com/pennsylvaniadepartmentofhealth



twitter.com/PAHealthDept