

Director's Update to the Board of Health February 2024

Protecting Health – Preventing the Spread of Infectious Disease

Respiratory Illnesses

Flu has plateaued and is starting to fall in Davidson County and across the country. RSV is declining and COVID has plateaued at low levels locally and appears to be ready to start declining. This is typical of winter respiratory disease seasons.

All three of these viruses are preventable and MPH D recommends getting vaccinated/boosted as soon as possible to prevent severe illness. Vaccines are widely available including an MPH D. To reduce the chance of spread in the meantime, consider the usual mitigation strategies of staying at home if ill, wearing a mask in crowded areas, and socially distancing.

TB

See Freeze Recovery, below.

Creating Healthier Community Environments

Food & Public Facilities

Food & Public Facilities added two new Environmental Health Specialists last month. With those vacancies filled, Food & Public Facilities is now fully staffed. There is at minimum a six-month training and learning curve before the new EHSs can work on their own, so it still will be some time before we see the full benefit, but we're glad to get to here.

MACC

Team Shelter spent last week at the MACC shelter conducting an evaluation of the facility and the program. The audit was provided as a service to MACC at no expense. We expect the final report to contain recommendations for capital improvements, staffing levels, program improvements (fosters/volunteers), and other resources necessary to provide a top-notch Animal Care program in a city the size of Nashville. (See Capital Spending Plan under Organizational Updates for more on this).

Improving Access to Healthcare

Free Tests

On January 30, we offered a Free Pap day event at Lentz, serving 10 individuals. We appreciate the family planning team for identifying and contacting patients that would be eligible for this service, while acknowledging January as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month.

Enrollment

We provide space to a volunteer who enrolls people in Affordable Care Act insurance plans, and have done so since 2014. She reports that we see few adults who qualify for TennCare (outside of the presumptive eligibility that accompanies pregnancy) unless they are well below 100 percent of poverty, typically 80 percent. This made a sizeable difference in getting people on insurance in 2022 and especially in 2023. She reports that she talked to far more people this year who had never previously pursued Marketplace insurance, driven at least partly by heavy online advertising at the federal level.

The chart below shows of number of people enrolled in TennCare, the ACA Marketplace, and those with “No Insurance Option” for 2023

	Total Family Size being assisted	How many # enrolled: ACA Health Insurance Plan	How many # enrolled in TennCare/Cover Kids	No-Insurance option	Monthly total	Total Assisted
Jan 1-31-2023	45	7	16	21	45	23
Feb 1-28 2023	33	2	3	28	33	5
Mar 1-31 2023	50	6	18	26	50	24
Apr 1-30-2023	40	15	6	19	40	21
May 1-31-2023	144	13	35	96	144	48
June 1-30-2023	37	7	7	23	37	14
July 1-31-2023	84	4	15	65	84	19
Aug 1 - 31-2023	99	14	38	47	99	52
sep 1-30-2023	65	5	12	48	65	17
Oct 1 -31-2023	61	6	12	42	60	18
Nov1-30-2023	118	43	22	48	113	65
Dec 1-30-2023	193	62	49	81	192	111
totals 2023	969	184	233	544	961	417

Car Seats

The Population Health Bureau would like to recognize Larry Sutton on his recent certification as a Child Passenger Safety Technician. This certification is a requirement for the department to receive state funds for our Car Seat Program. The Car Seat Program provides no-cost car seats to very low-income families and helps to ensure child passenger safety standards for our residents. Our congratulations to Larry.

Organizational Updates

Budget

The Metro budget is in process. Fortunately, we have not been asked to present a reduction scenario, which is a blessing. One area we are acutely aware of, as both the Mayor’s office and the Metro Council frequently look to it for additional money, is in vacant positions. We are working to fill them as expeditiously as we can.

Our budget submissions are due February 9. The memo from the Metro Director of Finance does not mention any potential salary improvements that may be recommended for FY25. Last year, most Metro employees ended up receiving a 6.0% cost of living raise and steps and open range improvements, amounting to raises of about 9 percent for most MPH employees. We will see what FY 25 is to bring.

Capital Spending Plan

There was good news for us in Mayor O’Connell’s Capital Spending plan issued a couple of week ago. There is \$9 million towards a replacement for the Woodbine clinic, which has been at the top of our capital needs list for several years now. There also was \$500,000 for “new facility planning” for MACC, reflecting a push among several Council members to replace the current animal shelter. The CSP will now go to the Council, which has the final say on what goes into it.

Recovering from Arctic Pleasantries

The flood issues caused by a ruptured fire sprinkler at Lentz during last month's deep freeze caused some disruptions to the normal course of business, as you might imagine, but we've adapted as best we can. Suite 110 (Sexual Health) was damaged, so we co-located that operation with Suite 120, providing STI screenings and treatment, PrEP and other services in what is normally the immunizations clinic only.

Also damaged was Suite 100, which houses many Tuberculosis Elimination Program services. Administrative work for that program was moved to the Charlotte Room, which is the WIC program's demonstration kitchen. The Tennessee Department of Health lent us some emergency shelters, known as FORTS, where our team can continue their work with infectious TB patients. You may have noticed the FORTS, which look something like large back-yard tool sheds, in the parking lot when you came in. MPH's IT group worked to ensure those external structures had the needed connectivity to function from the parking lot. The first patients were seen out there on Wednesday, January 31, exactly two weeks after the sprinkler failed.

The two clinics and the three Centennial rooms remained out of operation at press time last week. General Services, to whom we publicly owe a loud THANK YOU for all their efforts, estimated the Centennial rooms would be back in service by about next week and the rest within another couple of weeks from now.

My thanks to all those who went out of their way to get the work done under abnormal circumstances.