

Year in Review

Washtenaw County Health Department
December 2019



Washtenaw County Health Department has the legal responsibility to assure the public's health (Michigan Public Health Code, Public Act 368 of 1978). Every year, the Department provides essential and mandated services to protect and promote health for all. We work to address critical or emerging health issues and improve systems in collaboration with partners and community members. No other entity assesses and responds to threats to the community from communicable and chronic diseases, poor access to health care, health promotion practices or failure to protect the environment. This review highlights significant 2019 public health responses and actions through December 20, 2019; not all programs or service numbers are included.

Public Health Assessment & Community Engagement: Centering Health Equity in our Work

“One way to challenge the status quo is to bring the people that make up our community to the table to help identify the true needs of our most vulnerable members.”

Carla Pretto-Kernahan, co-chair,
Health for All Steering Committee

We continue to invest in and intensify efforts to achieve health equity and address the root causes of poor health. The **Health for All Steering Committee** was created this year to prioritize public health issues and improve conditions that support health. The committee is made up of community members, local health system and hospital representatives, and other organizational representatives and will provide leadership for developing the next county community health improvement plan. Similarly, the **Community Health Leadership Team** grew from our engagement work with six, prioritized communities (Latinx, MacArthur Blvd., Southside Ypsilanti, West Willow, Whitmore Lake and Ypsilanti youth) and works collaboratively with staff to take collective action. In 2019, the team identified mental health and social support for youth as priorities.

Public Health Outreach: Programs & Educational Campaigns

Thanks to grant funds and community partnerships, a new [play space](#) has created a more welcoming and interactive environment at the Human Services building; it includes painted sidewalks and play equipment and was officially opened with a late summer **block party and open house**. An estimated 700 community members participated, learned about services and made connections. Earlier in the year and in response to the government shut down, we worked with Food Gatherers to host **“extra” food distributions** and provided food to over 300 families (February 2019). Multiple outreach campaigns gathered community feedback, provided reliable education and connection to services; initiatives include **hepatitis A and handwashing; medical marijuana; youth vaping prevention** and the **#wishyouknew youth mental health campaign** in partnership with Community Mental Health and Washtenaw County Mental Health and Public Safety Preservation Millage. Additionally, the Health for All website launched www.healthforallwashtenaw.org and contains interactive data on hundreds of factors related to community health.

Prevention of **opioid** overdoses and deaths continues to be a priority. There were 20% fewer opioid related poisonings from January through September of 2019 compared to the same time period in 2018. This is good news and WCHD continues to be involved in multiple community initiatives to address the opioid crisis and reduce harm; a **community education and awareness campaign – It is POSSIBLE** includes messages of hope, recovery and harm reduction. It will launch in early 2020.



Public Health Response: Disease Outbreaks & Environmental Contaminants

Monitoring and controlling communicable disease is a key public health function. Notable events this year include a large outbreak of **adenovirus** on a local university campus, an international traveler diagnosed with **measles**, a cluster of **cryptosporidiosis** cases likely connected to a local university pool and local community pools and multiple cases of **electronic cigarette or vaping associated lung injury (EVALI)**. We also continue to see high numbers of **pertussis** cases, as well as a higher number of **legionellosis** cases.

Vector borne illnesses, water contamination and other environmental issues require increasing surveillance, attention and coordinated response efforts. Washtenaw County is an area with known risk for **Lyme disease**; reports of local cases are increasing. While there were no human or animal cases of **Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)** reported in Washtenaw County, a small portion of northern Washtenaw County was treated with an aerial insecticide in October due to a confirmed animal case in neighboring Livingston County. We continue to be actively involved in the **Gelman/1,4 dioxane** litigation and monitoring as well as sites contaminated with **per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)** and state and local response efforts. Additionally, after one local community began experiencing issues with **rats**, staff have supported response efforts with prevention and remediation information, engagement and communications.



Departmental Changes: Leadership Transitions & Service Enhancements

Multiple leadership transitions occurred this year, including the retirement of Ellen Rabinowitz and the appointment of Jimena Loveluck as **Health Officer**, Ruth Kraut as **Deputy Health Officer**, Dr. Juan Luis Marquez as acting **Medical Director**, Dr. Jeremy Lapedis as **Executive Director for the Washtenaw Health Plan**, and Dr. Allecia Wilson as **Medical Examiner**. In addition, our environmental health division has two new administrators and our nursing division three new nurse coordinators; three of these positions were internal promotions.

Once again, the Department passed **state accreditation with accolades** and has started preparations for our **first national re-accreditation**. Other administrative happenings include our Department now accepting **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan**, implementing a new **electronic medical record (Patagonia)** and working to **replace aging software** systems still in use in environmental health (Energov).



Moving Forward: 2020 and Beyond

Our **2020-2024 strategic plan** prioritizes building equitable, community-centered engagement; advocating for and maximizing resources; making data matter; and strengthening and supporting an engaged workforce.

Next year, changes in Title X funding are likely to limit access to reproductive health services. The Department is preparing to fill this gap by becoming a **Title X family planning provider**. We are extremely grateful to the **Board of Commissioners** for increasing the Department's funding allocation to meet this new challenge and other emerging health concerns – all while we continue to work to address systemic gaps, prevent disease and injury and support health for all in our community.