



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 11-09-11

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Local health departments continue to feel budget cuts squeeze at the Local, State and Federal level

Stanton - Public health departments, like the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), are fighting an uphill battle as they struggle to provide residents with basic public health services such as immunizations; a safe food supply via restaurant inspections; disease prevention such as E coli, meningitis and tuberculosis; and emergency preparedness services in the face of continued budget cuts.

Recent survey results, released by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), found that from 2008 to 2010, local health departments across the country lost 29,000 jobs to layoffs and attrition, roughly 19 percent of the 2008 local health department workforce. The Mid-Michigan District Health Department currently has 71 full-time equivalent employees, down from 83 in 2008.

Between June 2009 and July 2010, 38 percent of local health departments in the U.S. and 49 percent of health departments in Michigan experienced budget cuts from the previous year, while 46 percent of health departments in the U.S. and 84 percent of Michigan health departments experienced job losses.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department has not been immune to these cuts. In addition to cuts received last year, MMDHD also experienced cuts to Essential Local Public Health Services (ELPHS), Emergency Preparedness and other programs funded by the State, effective October 1, 2011. Programs funded by ELPHS include: water, sewage, food, communicable disease, sexually transmitted disease, immunizations, and school hearing and vision screenings. As a result of the state cuts, the department will reduce the frequency of restaurant inspections to some facilities as well as reduce communicable disease response capacity. The department will also be eliminating the Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program in Montcalm County that provides cancer screening, referral and treatment to women age 50 and over who do not have insurance.

The Montcalm County Board of Commissioners also cut the health department budget by over \$42,000 effective October 1, 2011. This will result in an additional \$25 charge on all Environmental Health food licenses and permits in Montcalm County, as well as a reduced work week for Montcalm Branch Office employees, effective November 1, 2011. Office hours will be 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, at least through the first week in March.

Local health departments all over Michigan have dealt with these challenges as they strive to keep the public safe and healthy in the face of continuing staff and program cuts. Continued and sustained investment in local health departments, like MMDHD, ensures that individuals and families will continue to receive the basic health services they rely on and that health departments will be adequately staffed, equipped, and prepared to respond to public health emergencies, like an infectious disease outbreak, natural disaster, or bioterrorism attack.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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