

# Connecting Point

A MID MICHIGAN DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER



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Visit [www.mmdhd.org](http://www.mmdhd.org) for more information on agency programs, services and health issues.

## **Immunization Waiver Program**

Immunizations are vital. They are safe and prevent many life-threatening diseases. While most parents vaccinate their children, there are some that don't, due to medical contraindications, philosophical or religious reasons.

Michigan has the fourth-highest rate of vaccine waivers in the nation. As of September 2015, the waiver rate for the State was 5.5 percent compared to the national median of 1.8 percent. Immunization waiver rates for our three counties were 6.5 percent for both Clinton and Montcalm, with Gratiot having the lowest at 2.2 percent.

To assure that parents are making a well-educated decision on whether or not to immunize their child, it is important that they receive accurate and thorough information on each immunization and the disease(s) it prevents. Consequently, Governor Snyder and lawmakers approved a rule that requires parents requesting a non-medical waiver to first be educated by a local health department about the risks of not receiving vaccines and the benefits of vaccination to their child and community. This rule went into effect on January 1, 2015. Parents previously could receive a philosophical or religious waiver without meeting with a health official. Michigan is one of 20 states that allows parents to obtain a waiver for philosophical reasons which are the most common reasons for a waiver (comprised 71% of all waivers in 2014).

Since implementing the waiver rule, the results are promising. According to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan's total waiver percentage for schools decreased from 4.6 percent in November 2014 to 2.8 percent in November 2015.

During the first year of implementation, MMDHD staff has educated parents and completed a total of 341 waivers: 158 in Clinton County, 51 in Gratiot County and 132 in Montcalm County. For more information on the Immunization Waiver Program, contact Sarah Doak, RN, Clinton County Supervisor, at (989) 227-3109 or [sdoak@mmdhd.org](mailto:sdoak@mmdhd.org)

## **Mental Health First Aid**

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an evidence based, 8-hour mental health public education program in which participants learn the risk factors and warning signs of mental illness. With this knowledge, they are better able to support someone facing a mental health crisis and connect them with appropriate professional help and self-help care strategies. The goals of MHFA include creating a greater understanding of mental illness to help reduce stigma, and providing early intervention help for those at risk.



At MMDHD, Community Health and Education clinic staff are being trained to become MHFA certified. This will allow them to better serve clients as well as the general public. MHFA training is an action item included in the Community Health Improvement Plans currently being developed by both Healthy Montcalm and Live Well Gratiot; these countywide initiatives focus on improving health throughout Montcalm and Gratiot Counties.

For more information on MHFA, contact Cheryl Thelen, LMSW at (989) 831-3634 or [cthlen@mmdhd.org](mailto:cthlen@mmdhd.org). You may also contact Amanda Estill, Community Outreach Coordinator at the Montcalm Care Network at (989) 831-7387 or [aestill@montcalmcare.net](mailto:aestill@montcalmcare.net). The Montcalm Care Network is leading MHFA training efforts throughout Montcalm County.



## ***Taking Action on Pertussis***

Pertussis, also known as “whooping cough,” is a respiratory disease that creates a “whooping” sound when the affected person gasps for air after a fit of coughing. It is spread by droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. Pertussis can cause serious symptoms for anyone, but is especially threatening to infants. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that “approximately half of babies less than one year old who get pertussis need treatment in the hospital.”

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) reports that the diagnosis of pertussis is often delayed or missed in young infants, because the initial symptoms are often mild. There is often a runny nose, no fever and a mild cough. “Illness may present as apnea, hypoxia or seizures.” After a few days, however, the symptoms become more severe, resulting in respiratory distress. In adolescents and adults, pertussis is often misdiagnosed as bronchitis or asthma.

MMDHD Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse recommends testing for individuals exposed to pertussis who also exhibits symptoms. Health care providers are encouraged to test for pertussis by “PCR testing of either nasal aspiration material or swabbing from the posterior nasopharynx. Serology testing *is not* accurate for diagnosis.” A video illustration of sample collection can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/clinical/diagnostic-testing/specimen-collection.html>.

While pertussis is treatable with antibiotics, delays in treatment may result in prolonged recovery, hospitalization or even death. Early treatment is critical, as is reporting confirmed cases to the local health department by physicians. Reporting is vital to identifying, monitoring and halting possible outbreaks. An increase in the number of pertussis cases nationwide makes reporting especially important.

The CDC states that the most effective way to prevent pertussis is through vaccination with DTaP for infants and children, and with Tdap for preteens, teens and adults. Vaccination of pregnant women with Tdap is especially important to help protect babies.

For more information on pertussis guidelines, contact Sarah Doak, RN, at (989) 227-3109 or at [sdoak@mmdhd.org](mailto:sdoak@mmdhd.org)

## ***Pathways to Better Health***

Trying to manage multiple chronic medical issues can be overwhelming. Someone may feel they have nowhere to turn and no one to ask for help. Thanks to the Pathways to Better Health Program, that help is now available.

Pathways connects qualifying mid-Michigan residents and families to community programs and services to better their health and lives. It is free to those who qualify. To be eligible, one must be 18 or older; have Medicaid, Medicare, the Healthy Michigan Plan, or be eligible; have two or more chronic health conditions; and live in Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Ingham or Montcalm Counties.

All services are provided at no cost in the client’s home by a professional Community Health Worker (CHW), who has received specialized training.

CHW’s help their clients with assistance in:

- Finding family doctors and specialists
- Finding counseling services
- Providing medication assistance
- Applying for health insurance
- Providing nutrition education
- Accessing community services (clothing, transportation, housing, food, etc.)
- Providing health condition education and management
- And much more!

If you or someone you know could benefit from the services of Pathways to Better Health, or to check on eligibility, contact 1-866-291-8691 or visit [www.carehubihp.org](http://www.carehubihp.org). For more information on MMDHD’s Community Health Worker program, contact Wendy Currie, RN at 989-875-1028 or [wendycurrie@mmdhd.org](mailto:wendycurrie@mmdhd.org).

*For more information about these and other Health Department programs, contact:*

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