

Daily News

Saturday, November 20, 2021

Montcalm County to begin spending ARPA money

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on November 20, 2021

STANTON — Montcalm County is beginning to spend its first installment of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal dollars.



Montcalm County Controller-Administrator Brenda Taeter, left, asks commissioners how they would like to start spending the county's \$12.4 million share of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal money. Commissioners voted on Nov. 8 to recommend the full board approve spending nearly half a million dollars of the money on two projects — updating aerial photography of county parcels and redesigning the county website. The full board will vote on the recommendation at Monday's meeting. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Montcalm County has received \$6.2 million in ARPA money (the first half of the \$12.4 million in total the county is expected to receive). The funds must be obligated by the end of 2024 with all bills paid by the end of 2026, according to Montcalm County Controller-Administrator Brenda Taeter.

Of the total \$12.4 million amount, \$3.5 million will go toward estimated county revenue loss from 2020 through 2024, while an estimated \$1.2 million will go toward an improved distancing/security project for the county jail and courts, an estimated \$1 million will go toward an improved pandemic response building project, an estimated \$1 million will go toward an improved ventilation project in multiple county buildings, an estimated \$1 million will go

toward an improved remote access project (including digitizing county records), an estimated \$800,000 will go toward negative society impact projects (such as Court Appointed Special Advocates or CASA, which has already requested \$340,000 over three years in ARPA money from the county) and an estimated \$300,000 will go toward improved outdoor/park venues projects, leaving the county with \$3.5 million more to spend.

Montcalm County's Committee-of-the-Whole on Nov. 8 voted 8-0 (with Commissioner Scott Painter of Greenville absent) to recommend the full board approve spending nearly half a million dollars of the ARPA money on two projects — updating aerial photography of county parcels and redesigning the county website. These projects will come out of the \$1 million improved remote access project portion of the funding as listed above.

A \$406,694 contract with Pictometry International Corp. in Rochester, N.Y., will involve two flyovers of the county which will allow citizens and businesses alike to view updated aerial photos of any parcel in the county online. The first flyover will take place in the spring of 2022 and the second one will take place in the spring of 2025.

The county previously voted to use Pictometry for a similar project in 2014 at a cost of \$106,472 over three years, with that cost reduced thanks to a partnership between Montcalm, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties, with local municipalities also paying for Montcalm County's portion. Commissioner Chris Johnston of Crystal Township asked whether townships will be helping pay for the updated aerial photo project, but Taeter said the county will fund the project this time as it has the necessary money from ARPA.

Commissioners also voted to approve a \$47,445 contract with Civic Plus in Manhattan, Kansas, to redesign the county's website (montcalm.org) which will allow citizens to request and pay for multiple services completely online. Civic Plus also requires an annual maintenance fee of \$8,782. Montcalm County's website was last redesigned in 2016.

Taeter has assembled an ARPA Committee — comprised of herself, Undersheriff Andy Doezema, Maintenance Director Doug Geitzen, Juvenile Court Administrator Kristi Jeffrey and Emergency Services Director Eric Smith — to determine how to spend the county's ARPA money.

Taeter asked commissioners on Nov. 8 whether they would like to approve all ARPA-related requests or give the committee its full faith in decision-making.

"I think the dollar amount should come to us to look at for approval," Commissioner Michael Beach of Carson City said.

"I see it the opposite way," countered Commissioner Adam Petersen of Montcalm Township. "It's free money. It's not anything out of the general fund."

"Do you want to just approve project totals for us and that would be the number we would shoot for to stay under that?" Taeter clarified. "Or do you want us to bring every contract and agreement and project to you?"

"To me it shouldn't be an all or nothing thing," Commissioner Phil Kohn of Edmore said. "I'd be uncomfortable if you guys were spending \$140,000 without the commissioners' blessing. That's a lot of money. We argue over much less (this comment resulted in a few chuckles around the table).

"On the other hand, if you're going to spend \$1,000 on something, that wouldn't bug me," Kohn said.

Taeter noted that the county already has an expenditure policy stating that anything between the cost of \$5,000 and \$15,000 requires going out for three bids, while anything that costs more than \$15,000 requires a sealed bid process.

Commissioners seemed agreeable to using this policy for ARPA decisions going forward.

The Montcalm County Board of Commissioners is next scheduled to meet at 4 p.m. Monday to vote on the aerial photo project and the county website redesign.

What's on the agenda?

The Montcalm County Board of Commissioners is scheduled to meet at 4 p.m. Monday for its regular monthly full board meeting. All meetings are open to the public and take place on the third floor of the Montcalm County Administrative Building in Stanton.

Here's a look at what's on the agenda:

- **VACCINE MANDATE UPDATE:** Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Liz Braddock will be present to provide an update and answer questions about President Joe Biden's COVID vaccine mandate for businesses, which is currently on hold by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) after the U.S. Court of Appeals Fifth Circuit ordered the mandate be halted until further notice.

"This is in reference to the OSHA Emergency Temporary Standard where employers with 100 or more employees have to develop, implement and enforce a mandatory COVID-19 vaccine policy," Braddock told the Daily News regarding her presentation. "This is not a health department mandate and I was asked to attend to answer any questions regarding testing and vaccine that may come up during the discussion."

- **ARPA MONEY:** Commissioners will decide whether to approve a recommendation from their Committee-Of-The-Whole to spend nearly half a million dollars of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money on an aerial photography parcel project and a redesign of the county's website (see accompanying story). Commissioners will also decide whether to approve an ARPA money request from Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of \$340,000 over three years.

- **INTERCOUNTY DRAIN PETITION:** Commissioners will decide whether to approve a recommendation from their Committee-Of-The-Whole to adopt a resolution pledging the county's full faith and credit on the Nov. 172 Intercounty Drain petition, per a request from Drain Commissioner Todd Sattler.

Daily News

Monday, November 22, 2021

Montcalm Prevention Collaborative celebrate medication disposal milestone

By [The Daily News Staff](#) | on November 22, 2021

Submitted by the Montcalm Prevention Collaborative

SHERIDAN — On Nov. 6, Montcalm Prevention Collaborative's (MPC) Medication Disposal Work Team hosted a medication take back day at Sheridan Community hospital where more than 30 pounds of medication was collected. The event was held in conjunction with local law enforcement and Sheridan Community Hospital.



Former Montcalm County sheriff Bill Barnwell and former Sheridan Community Hospital pharmacy director Mary Thomas were both honored for their contributions to the Montcalm Prevention Collaborative on Nov. 6. — Submitted photo

Past and current MPC members were in attendance, as well as several community partners who helped make the medication disposal program a success. Attendees celebrated a milestone 12 years in the making — the collection of 10,000 pounds of medication. That's 10,000 pounds of medication diverted from landfills, countless accidental poisonings averted, and substance use disorders prevented.

At the event, MPC recognized Mary Thomas and former Montcalm County sheriff Bill Barnwell for their contributions to the cause.

“Montcalm Prevention Collaborative would like to especially thank Mary Thomas because without her, this program wouldn’t exist,” said Amy O’Brien, MPC Executive Board chair. “The Collaborative would also like to thank the community partners that have helped make this program a success. Those partners include Montcalm Sheriff Department, Michigan State Police, Carson City Police Department, Greenville Department of Public Safety, Lakeview Police Department, Carson City Hospital, Sheridan Community Hospital, Spectrum Health United and Kelsey Hospitals, Montcalm Care Network and Mid-Michigan District Health Department.”

In 2009, Mary Thomas, then pharmacy director at Sheridan Community Hospital, was concerned about the negative impact that improperly stored and improperly disposed medication was having on the health of our citizens and the environment. This realization prompted her to take action to address the need for safe medication disposal in Montcalm County. She gathered representatives from many local organizations, including the hospitals, law enforcement (including Barnwell), local government, the health department, concerned citizens, and others to begin to tackle the issue.

Not long after this initial meeting the Medication Disposal Coalition was born with

the mission of providing education and resources for proper disposal of medications in an effort to protect our environment, prevent childhood poisonings and reduce substance abuse.

On Oct. 20, 2010, the Medication Disposal Coalition held its first medication take back day at the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Stanton, where a total of 339 pounds of medication was collected. This was one of the first grassroots led medication take-back days in Michigan, which is something the group is very proud of.

The Medication Disposal Team continued to hold periodic take-back days but quickly realized the need to provide Montcalm County residents with easy, everyday access to medication disposal. By the fall of 2012, the group had purchased medication drop boxes and placed them in the lobbies of the Sheriff’s Department in Stanton, and police stations in Carson City, Howard City, Lakeview and Greenville Department of Public Safety.

In 2012, the Medication Disposal Team joined Drug Free Montcalm. This move provided access to much needed funding, which allowed this important work to continue. In 2014, Drug Free Montcalm became Youthink Montcalm, which then became the MPC in 2017. That’s a lot of change in short period of time, but MPC is here to stay and is committed to reducing substance use throughout Montcalm County, especially in youth.

In 2016, Montcalm Prevention Collaborative partnered with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department and later with Spectrum Health United and Kelsey Hospitals to offer sharps disposal to residents and began distributing Narcan kits in conjunction with Montcalm Care Network.

To learn more about MPC, how you can become involved, or when the next medication disposal drop-off event will be, visit montcalmprevention.org.

Daily News

Wednesday, November 24, 2021

Montcalm County officials voice concern about federal COVID mandate

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on November 24, 2021



Montcalm County Controller-Administrator Brenda Taeter, right, voiced concern Monday about the complications of “policing” President Joe Biden’s COVID vaccination, testing and masking mandate for county government employees. Commissioner Adam Petersen of Montcalm Township, left, said he “roundly opposes the whole deal.” — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

STANTON — President Joe Biden’s COVID vaccine, masking and testing mandate remains on hold in court, but Montcalm County officials are voicing concern about policing the mandate if it moves forward.

Meanwhile, the local health officer says Montcalm County is experiencing a COVID testing shortage, which may complicate matters even further.

The federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration’s (OSHA) emergency temporary standard mandate (see accompanying info box for details) is currently blocked by order of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The Biden administration is asking the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to eliminate the other appeals court order, claiming that court erred in its interpretation.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Liz Braddock attended Monday's Montcalm County Board of Commissioners meeting to explain what the mandate could mean for county government employees if the mandate is eventually implemented.

Braddock said Montcalm County — which has about 280 county government employees — needs to “wait and see” what happens in court.

“Right now the OSHA requirement is on hold,” Braddock said. “As long as it's on hold, you do not need to move forward with it. If it moves forward, I would suggest that you maybe do some planning about how you are going to communicate with your employees on what they need to do.

“This is not the health department or Michigan, this is an OSHA requirement, which Michigan falls under,” she emphasized.

Braddock then explained how the county should proceed if the mandate moves forward.

“They (county government employees) would need to provide you with a vaccine record and they would need to make arrangements on their dime for weekly testing (not at-home testing) and agree to wear masks in the offices and buildings,” she said.



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Liz Braddock updated the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners on Monday regarding President Joe Biden's COVID vaccination, testing and masking mandate for certain employers, which remains on hold due to a court order and is not currently being enforced. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

“We are running into a situation in Montcalm where we don't have enough testing anyway, so the schools are doing their own testing,” she noted. “It's (the federal mandate) a big request for people who are over 100 (employees) and we don't have enough testing available in-house or in Montcalm. We carry about 300 tests with us at the health department, we are using them for emergency situations, such as the jail or a long-term care facility. You may need to consider how you would approach that to make sure that your staff knows how to do the testing. We do have a list of vendors that the state has provided the medical director. I can forward that to you. There may be some local locations that do testing; however, you want an instant test, and a PCR test is a 24-hour test, so maybe the hospitals would not be a good idea for the (federal) intent here.

“We have copies of records of those (county government employees) who are vaccinated,” she added. “We can help you understand what records are required. They (county government employees) can do it themselves too. We have vaccine available (at the local health department) if any of your staff do want to get vaccinated. Having the booster does not matter right now, just being fully vaccinated.”

“What’s your sense of when or if it (the mandate) will move forward, or how long it’s going to be stalled out?” Board Chairman Patrick Q. Carr of Cato Township asked.

“I think it’s going to be stalled for a while because more than one state has filed suit,” Braddock said. “Michigan has not filed suit and I don’t know if we ever will. Jan. 4 (the mandate deadline) is going to come around pretty quickly.”

“The (local) health department doesn’t have any plans nor has implemented any type of vaccination or mask mandate, correct?” Commissioner Adam Petersen of Montcalm Township clarified for audience members present.

“No, we have not and we have no intention,” Braddock responded.

“I know we have a lot of concerned citizens, so I want to get that out there as much as possible because it’s a very hot button issue,” Petersen said.

“I know it’s not something I’m looking forward to policing,” Montcalm County Controller-Administrator Brenda Tater admitted. “I don’t know how one person is going to do that. I’ll probably make a lot of enemies if I do it.”

“You can’t do the whole place,” Carr said to Taeter regarding all county facilities. “It’s going to have to be by department or by building.”

Taeter noted that while a religious exemption can get some people out of being vaccinated, the mandate still requires those people wear masks and receive regular tests.

“I know that will be a fight already,” Taeter said. “I’ve already had one person.”

“As well I think it should be,” Petersen responded. “I roundly oppose the whole deal. As far as who’s going to pay for the testing is what really hangs me up. Trying to get money out of the feds is like getting blood out of a turnip. I just don’t see this going well and if they implement this without thinking about every avenue I just think it’s going to be a nightmare and the county might be on the hook for something.”

A closer look at the federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration’s emergency temporary standard mandate (which is currently on hold in federal court):

- The mandate affects all private employers with 100 or more employees firm- or corporate-wide. In states with OSHA-approved state plans, state and local government employers, as well as private employers with 100 or more employees will be covered by state occupational safety and health requirements.
- The mandate requires the above-mentioned employers to develop, implement and enforce a mandatory COVID vaccine policy, with an exception for employers that instead establish, implement and enforce a policy allowing employees to elect either to get vaccinated or to undergo weekly COVID testing and wear a face covering in the work place.
- The mandate requires employers to determine the vaccination status of each employee, obtain proof of vaccine from those employees, maintain records of each employee’s vaccination status and maintain a roster of each employee’s vaccination status.

- The mandate requires employers to ensure that each employee who is not fully vaccinated is tested for COVID at least once weekly, require employees to promptly provide notice when they receive a positive COVID test or are diagnosed with COVID, immediately remove from the workplace any employee regardless of vaccination status who received a positive COVID test or was diagnosed with COVID and keep that employee out of the workplace until return to work criteria are met.
- The mandate require employers to ensure that each employee who is not fully vaccinated wear a face covering when indoors or when occupying a vehicle with another person for work purposes, except in certain limited circumstances.
- The mandate requires employers to provide each employee with information about the requirement of the mandate and workplace policies and procedures established to implement the mandate, vaccine efficacy, safety and the benefits of being vaccinated according to the CDC document “Key Things to Know About COVID-19 Vaccination,” protections against retaliation and discrimination, and laws that provide for criminal penalties for knowingly supplying false statements or documents.

Source: Occupational Safety & Health Administration

Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, November 25, 2021

Health Department's Nurses Ask Public For Help

As COVID-19 continues to spread in Clinton, Gratiot, and Montcalm counties, Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department's (MMDHD) Communicable Disease Nurses find themselves stretched pretty thin. This has been the case throughout the pandemic, but a recent surge in cases reported to MMDHD has compounded the problem.

“Our nurses work tirelessly, seven days a week, answering the public’s COVID-related questions and providing those who are COVID-19 positive with important guidance. Our nurses make every effort to return phone calls in a timely manner, but that is becoming more and more difficult,” says Sarah Doak, MMDHDs Community Health and Education Division Director. “It getting to the point where our nurses may not be able to return every call, so we are asking the public for help.”

MMDHD wants to make sure people get answers to their COVID-19 questions but would like the public to know that they can usually find the answers they are looking for by visiting its website at www.mmdhd.org/covid-center/. Here you’ll find up-to-date information on quarantine, isolation, what to do if you test positive or are exposed to someone who is positive, guidance on at-home antigen tests, who is eligible to get a COVID-19 booster, how to schedule a COVID-19 vaccination appointment, and much more. If you have tested positive or have been identified as a close contact, you can even find a handy COVID Calculator on our website at www.mmdhd.org/covid-center/. This calculator can help you figure out when and how long you need to quarantine or isolate. It can also calculate when you could be at risk of re-infection and when a person is considered fully vaccinated.

“Checking our website for guidance before calling the health department will help free up our nurses to answer the most complex COVID-19 questions,” Added Doak. MMDHD would also like to remind the public that if they test positive for COVID-19, they should:

Isolate at least 10 days from the onset of symptoms. If you have no symptoms, isolate for 10 days from the date of your positive test. After 10 days you may end your isolation if it has been at least 24 hours with no fever without using a fever-reducing medication and if your COVID-19 symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, etc.) have improved.

Notify your close contacts and let them know that they need to quarantine for 10 days. Those who are COVID-19 positive can spread the virus beginning 48 hours (two days) before symptoms start or 48 hours (two days) before testing positive.

Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, November 25, 2021

Visit our website at www.mmdhd.org/covid-center/ and fill out the “Positive Self-Reporting Form” which can be found under the “Important Alerts” heading.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department offers several COVID-19 vaccination clinics each week by appointment only to those who are eligible. To find out if you are eligible, visit our website at www.mmdhd.org/covid-center/. Those who have not been vaccinated or those who qualify for a booster are encouraged to call the branch office nearest them to schedule an appointment:

Clinton County: 989-224-2195, option #5 and then option #2

Gratiot County: 989-875-3681, option #5 and then option #2

Montcalm County: 989-831-5237, option #5 and then option #2

MMDHD is also asking community members to remain vigilant and practice these strategies to help slow the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands frequently
 - Stay at least six feet away from others not in your household
 - Wear a mask around others not in your household
 - Avoid crowded areas or large gatherings
 - Ventilate indoor spaces if around others not in your household
 - Seek testing if ill, exposed, or after traveling
 - Follow isolation or quarantine guidance if ill, exposed, or waiting for test results
- Community members are encouraged to visit our website (www.mmdhd.org) for the most up-to-date COVID-19 related information.

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

Daily News

Monday, November 29, 2021

Local Board of Health approves syringe service program for Montcalm County to combat HIV outbreak

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on November 29, 2021



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse explains why she is recommending implementing a syringe service program in Montcalm County in order to combat increasing HIV cases related to injection drug use. The Board of Health voted 5-0 last Wednesday to implement the program for Montcalm County, as well as Clinton and Gratiot counties. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

A needle exchange program is coming to Montcalm County to help combat an increasing number of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) cases associated with injection drug use.

Members of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health know the idea won't be popular with everyone, but they believe it's a program that could help make a difference locally in fighting the ongoing problem of drug abuse.

The Board of Health met at the health department's branch office in St. Johns last Wednesday and voted 5-0 (with Gratiot County Commissioner Chuck Murphy absent) to implement a syringe service program starting in Montcalm County, and expanding to Clinton and Gratiot counties in the future.

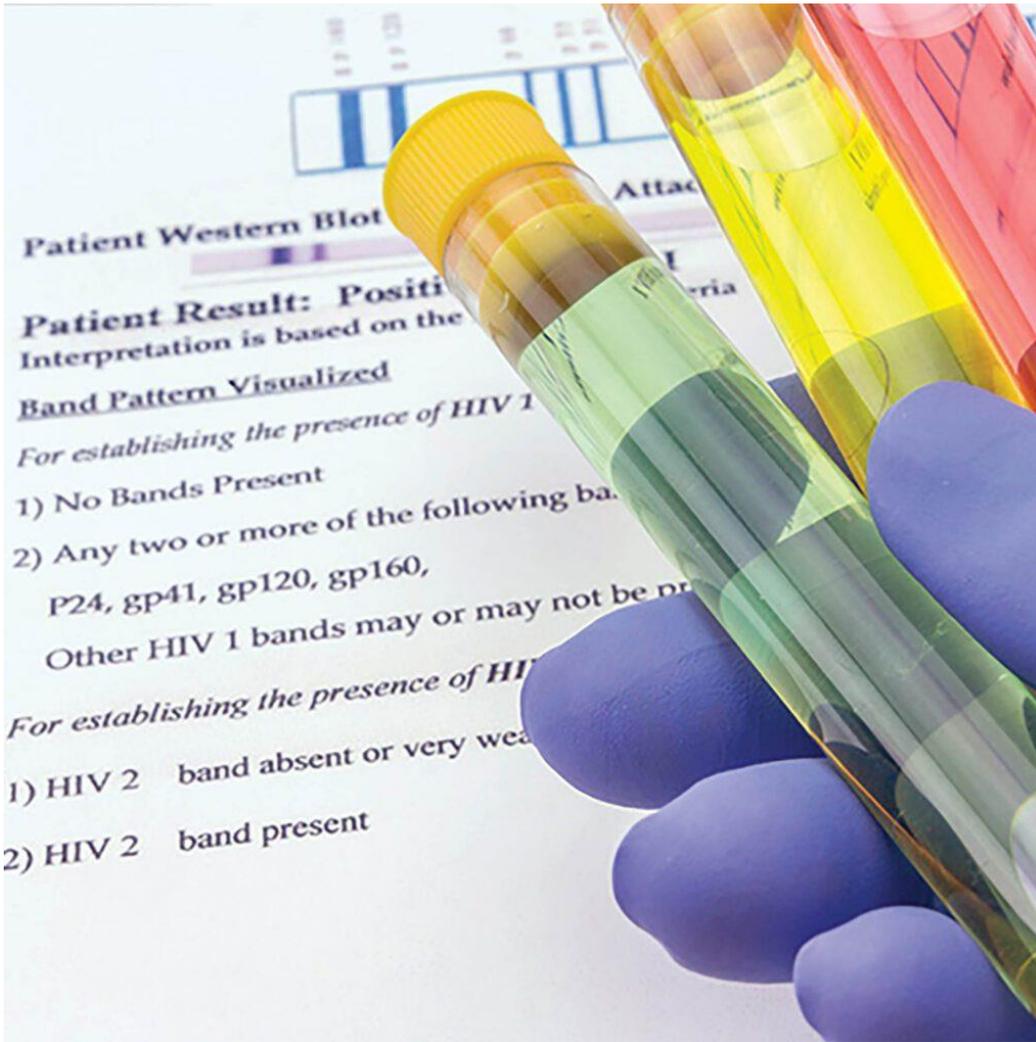
While HIV cases are declining overall in Michigan, HIV cases are increasing in West Michigan, including Montcalm County, which the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services has identified as being at risk for an HIV outbreak, as the Daily News previously detailed in an Oct. 30 story.

HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system and, if not treated, can lead to AIDS. People can get or transmit HIV through specific activities, such as through sex or injection drug use.

"There has been a cluster of new HIV cases identified in Montcalm County which is associated with drug use," Mid-Michigan District Health Department Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse summarized. "We're just starting to do more testing and we're worried there may be more cases."

FROM HEROIN TO HIV

In a detailed report to the Board of Health, Morse explained the three waves of the rise in opioid overdose deaths in the U.S. An increase in prescription opioid overdose deaths began in 1999 and plateaued around 2010, at which time heroin overdose deaths began increasing. Heroin overdose deaths plateaued around 2013, at which time synthetic opioid deaths (from substances such as fentanyl) began increasing and continue to do so.



The Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Stanton offers anonymous and confidential HIV and STD testing. Montcalm County residents can call (989) 831-3615 for HIV test details and (989) 831-5237 for STD test details or visit mmdhd.org/hiv for more information. — Submitted photo | Mid-Michigan District Health Department

For every 100 people in Montcalm County, nearly 124 were given opioid prescriptions in 2015, according to Morse. As the dangers of prescribing opioids became more well known, by 2020, that number was reduced to about 48 people in Montcalm County, cutting the amount by nearly one-third. While that sounds like good news, Morse said many of those same people found other ways to inject drugs.

“If you take away one substance, there’s a replacement with another, unfortunately,” she said.

Montcalm County was one of the multiple counties with the highest level of heroin overdose death rates in Michigan in 2018 (from six to nearly 10 people per every 100,000 people).

Montcalm County was one of 10 counties in Michigan with the highest rate of heroin substance abuse treatment in 2019 (from 291 to 550 people per every 100,000 people).

This past year (from Jan. 1 to Nov. 1), Montcalm County saw Naloxone (a medicine that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose) issued by emergency services personnel at a rate of 70 per every 100,000 people. This number is one-third less than Michigan’s state average for issuing Naloxone, but yet Montcalm County experienced 1.7 times more suspected fatal drug overdoses than the state average.

“We’re having more people dying than average and less Naloxone given than average,” Morse summarized.

Aside from drug overdose deaths, injection drug use is creating new HIV cases locally.

One in seven people in the U.S. living with HIV are unaware of their status, and four out of 10 new HIV infections are transmitted by people who are living with undiagnosed HIV, according to the U.S. CDC.

In 2016, youth aged 13 to 24 in the U.S. comprised the highest percentage of individuals living with undiagnosed HIV of any age group. They also had the lowest rate of viral suppression of any age group, meaning they were not receiving proper care for their health condition.

Another factor driving HIV cases in Michigan involves men who have sex with men who inject drugs, according to Morse’s report. That risk group has continued to see a persistent increase in HIV cases from 2010 to the present, but this topic was only briefly mentioned at Wednesday’s meeting.

Morse noted this year marks the 40th anniversary of when HIV first appeared in the U.S.

“We’ve made a lot of great progress with it, but we are actually starting to see some backslides,” she said. “It is largely driven by the intravenous drug use community.

“It is very, very treatable now,” she added of HIV. “It’s not curable for the most part, but those who are in treatment now have a normal life span and life expectancy, so that is very important to recognize.”

OTHER HEALTH ISSUES

Injection drug use not only increases the risk of HIV but also hepatitis C and B infections.

As well as causing addiction/dependence and risk of overdose and death, injection drug use can also cause multiple other health issues such as MRSA, skin, blood and heart infections, tetanus, wound botulism, anthrax, tuberculosis and malaria.

Three-quarters of Americans living with hepatitis C are Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1965), but the largest increases in new hepatitis C infections over the last decade involve people ages 18 to 39 — and this is primarily due to increased injection drug use associated with the opioid crisis, according to the CDC.

Montcalm County has one of Michigan’s highest levels of chronic hepatitis C rates (nearly 50 to nearly 68 people per every 100,000 people, as of 2019).

“The main factor in that risk group (ages 18 to 39) is the sharing of injection drugs,” Morse noted.

HARM REDUCTION

In 2019, the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services invested approximately \$1.25 million into harm reduction services, including syringe service programs, non-abstinence-based housing and employment initiatives, information on safer drug use, drug consumption rooms, psychosocial support and more.

Harm Reduction In Michigan

Syringe Service Programs (SSPs)

WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

Harm reduction is a respectful, non-judgmental approach to reducing the harms of substance use that meets people where they are at. **For example:**



THE NUMBERS

January 1, 2020 — March 31, 2021

Michigan SSPs

- 25** Programs
- 52** Sites
- 6** Upcoming Programs

2,332

REFERRALS TO SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT

21,201

PARTICIPANTS DIRECTLY SERVED

38,269

NALOXONE KITS DISTRIBUTED

2,618

OVERDOSES REVERSED



407

HIV TESTS CONDUCTED

293

HEPATITIS C TESTS CONDUCTED



Michigan.gov/SSP



According to the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services, syringe service programs offer a variety of beneficial harm reduction services to injection drug users. — Submitted photo | MDHHS

Michigan’s harm reduction slogan is “Change. At Your Own Pace.” and refers people to Naloxone locations and additional services (michigan.gov/opioids or michigan.gov/ssp).

“Harm reduction tries to minimize negative health impacts of intravenous drug use,” Morse said. “They are very much evidence-based methods and cost-effective. The goal is to encourage positive lifestyle changes and keep people alive until they’re ready to quit (drugs).

“Everyone’s at a different place in that spectrum,” she added. “If anyone’s ever smoked or struggled with their weight, you know that people might tell you that need to quit smoking or lose weight, but we’re not all at that point and we just have to do the best we can to make it to that point. That’s a similar situation here.”

When it comes to syringe service programs, Morse admitted she used to be skeptical.

“When I first heard about them six years ago I thought, well, you’re just going to encourage drug use, right?” she recalled. “It’s important that we all understand no, that’s not true, these are a helpful thing, we’re actually going to reduce drug use.”

Currently, the closest syringe service programs to Montcalm County are located at the Ionia County Health Department in Ionia, as well as in Fremont, Grand Rapids and Mount Pleasant.

Morse said the local health department will offer Montcalm County’s new syringe service program in conjunction with The Red Project in Grand Rapids (redproject.org), with assistance from Kate Behrenwald who works in recovery services for Spectrum Health.

‘ANY PORT IN A STORM’

Board of Health members voiced both support and concern regarding implementing a syringe service program.



The Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health voted 5-0 last Wednesday to implement a syringe service program in Montcalm County, as well as in Clinton and Gratiot counties, to combat increasing HIV cases related to injection drug use. Pictured on the Board of Health’s Zoom option screen, from left clockwise, are Administrative Services Director Melissa Selby, Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse Health Officer Liz Braddock, Board Chairman Bruce DeLong (a Clinton County commissioner), board member George Bailey (a Gratiot County commissioner), board member Dwight Washington (a Clinton County commissioner) and board member Adam Petersen (a Montcalm County commissioner). Not pictured is board member Michael Beach (a Montcalm County commissioner) who was present via Zoom. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Clinton County Commissioner Dwight Washington asked how many needles are typically given out to a drug user who participates in the program.

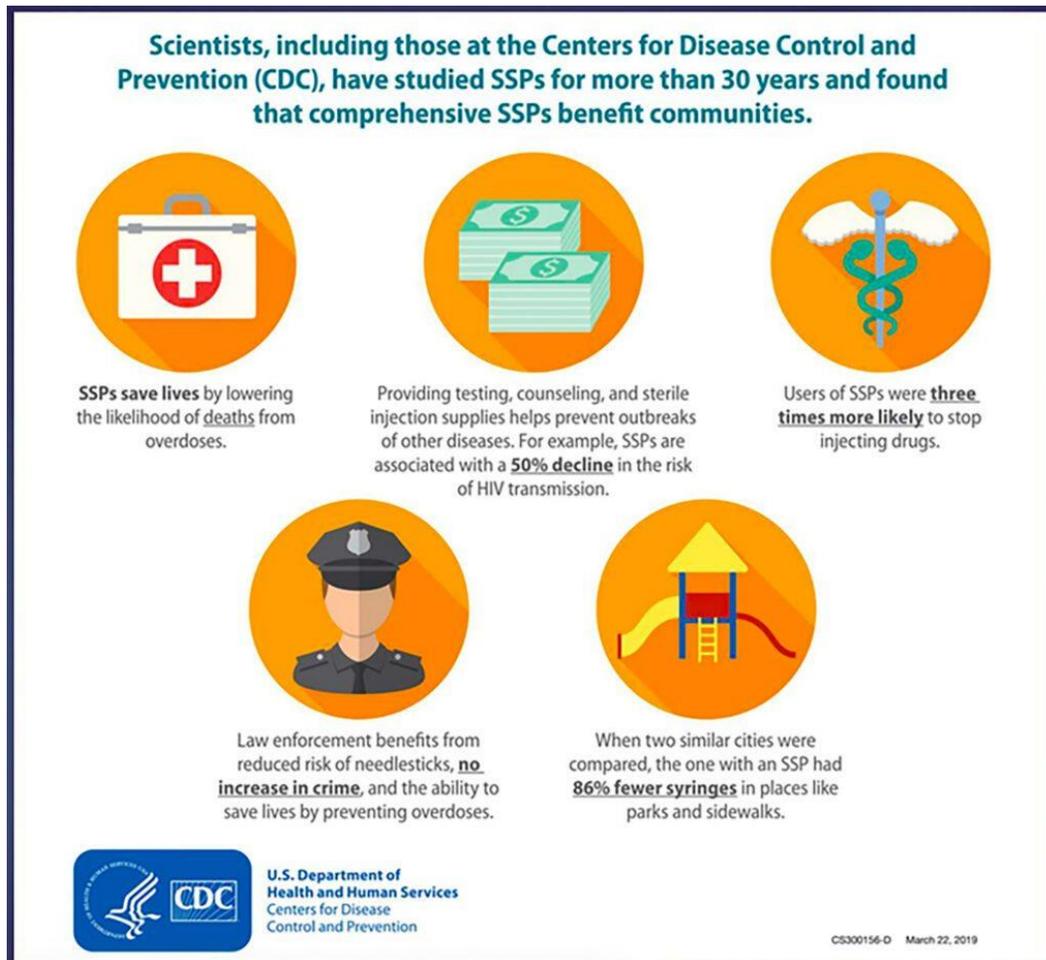
“Typically someone is assessed and given how much they need until they can come back again,” Morse said. “They’re also taught — this is not the preferred method — but there are ways that they can clean their needles and bleach them, that is like the last resort but it’s better than using somebody else’s syringe, it’s better than nothing. They’re given as much as they need until they can come back again.”

“That just seems so crazy because I think I saw that some people use (drugs) 16 times a day?” Washington asked.

“There are quite a few drugs that have a really short half-life, especially the stimulants like meth and cocaine,” Morse confirmed. “People do inject very, very often. You think about the damage to their being and their body. That’s another thing about harm reduction is teaching people how to inject safely so they don’t end up with abscesses. I know it sounds strange, but just teaching people how to do it in a way that’s going to be the least harmful to their body, because our goal is that they will eventually quit and when they do we want them to be healthy.”

“So like up to 100 needles to somebody, if they do it multiple times a day?” Washington pressed.

“Yes, whatever they need,” Morse confirmed.



According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, syringe service programs save lives by preventing drug overdoses, lower the risk of HIV transmissions, help participants be more likely to stop injecting drugs, help keep law enforcement officers safe and greatly reduces the amount of syringes found in public places. — Submitted photo | CDC

“It just seems crazy to me to think that you’re giving like 100 needles to people out in the community,” Washington said.

“They also get sharps containers and directions on how to dispose of them safely if they don’t have sharps containers,” Morse noted. “The program takes back the used syringes and disposes of them properly. That’s a huge part of it. Areas that use programs like this have less syringes in their parks and communities.”

“I was a non-believer five years ago, but the more I have to deal with this, the more I think we have to do things to curb that,” Gratiot County Commissioner George Bailey said.

“I have the issue in my head of being an enabler and providing needles for drug use,” Clinton County Commissioner Bruce DeLong said. “But on the other hand, if you’re collecting up those needles and at least giving them clean needles to use and stopping the transmission ... it’s counterintuitive in my mind, but I understand.”

“This sure is a hot issue,” Montcalm County Commissioner Adam Petersen admitted. “I think that any option, any port in a storm, I guess. I know that Montcalm County, especially in my area, has a very large drug problem and this is the first initiative I’ve seen anyone take to try and combat the drug issue. This is kind of loud and in your face and it’ll get the word out there. Will it help? I guess nobody’s going to know until we try it.”

Morse said people involved in syringe service programs are three times more likely to quit drugs than the average drug user. She said peer counselors who were former drug users themselves will also be made available to drug users, and understand what they are going through.

“The biggest benefit you can give to somebody is to just show that they’re a human being and that you care about them,” she said. “If somebody feels like they’re worth something, that’s the biggest impact to them.”

“I think we need to support our people,” Petersen concluded. “Dr. Morse feels very strongly about this program and I think we need to get behind that. I don’t think it’s going to increase the drug problem at all.”

The Board of Health then voted 5-0 to implement the syringe service program (all five members present voted “yes,” including Montcalm County Commissioner Michael Beach who was present via Zoom). Some members added that they would like to receive a report every six months to show how or if the program is working.

To view Morse’s complete slideshow presentation on the topic, visit www.mmdhd.org, then “About MMDHD” and “Board of Health,” then “2021 Board of Health regular meetings,” then “Nov. 24, 2021” and then “Meeting packet.”

The next Board of Health meeting will be 9 a.m. on Dec. 15. The board’s annual organizational meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. on Jan. 26.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SYRINGE SERVICE PROGRAMS

A syringe service program (SSP) is a community-based public health program that provides services to prevent drug use, HIV and viral hepatitis. The program offers free, clean needles and syringes and safe disposal of needs and syringes, referral to substance use disorder treatment and overdose treatment and education. SSPs do not increase drug use or crime.

In 2017, Michigan SSPs directly served nearly 8,000 clients, distributed more than 672,000 clean needles and nearly one in four SSP clients referred to substance use treatment received treatment.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF AN SSP?

- Reduce HIV prevalence by as much as 50%.
- Reduce hepatitis C prevalence by as much as 50%.
- Reduce drug poisoning (overdose) death by providing naloxone/Narcan to people at high risk of witnessing an opiate overdose.
- Reduce accidental needle sticks by 66% in law enforcement professionals.
- Increase the proper disposal of syringes and other hazardous materials.
- Increase access to substance use disorder treatment and recovery services. SSP participants have been shown to be up to five times more likely to access substance use disorder and recovery services, and stay enrolled in those services, than people injecting drugs and not utilizing an SSP.

- SSPs are safe, effective, and cost-saving.

SSP SERVICES CAN INCLUDE:

- HIV and Hepatitis C testing and linkage to care.
- Training in overdose prevention and response with access to narcan/naloxone.
- Hepatitis A and B vaccines.
- Recovery coaching and linkage to substance use disorder treatment.
- Assistance in accessing medical care.
- Basic wound care that reduces emergency room visits and hospitalizations from untreated minor injuries.
- Access to safer sex education and supplies.

RESOURCES

If you or someone you know needs help with opioid use disorder, call the SAMSHA National Hotline, a 24/7 treatment referral hotline, at 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

The Mid-State Health Network is available 24/7 at 1-844-405-3095 to answer questions regarding alcohol and drug use and to discuss options for those needing treatment services.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Stanton offers anonymous and confidential HIV and STD testing. Call (989) 831-3615 for HIV test details and (989) 831-5237 for STD test details or visit mmdhd.org/hiv for more information.

Source: Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

Daily News

Monday, December 6, 2021

Central Montcalm parents ask about vaccine mandate

LORIHANSEN | correspondent

STANTON — The Central Montcalm Public School Board of Education heard a concern from parents concerning student vaccines.

November's 10-minute school board meeting included a question by parents who have two students in the district.

"What is the district's stance on mandating vaccines? Are you going to mandate that students 5- to 11-years-old are vaccinated (against COVID)?" asked Sean Bailey of Sheridan.

Sean, and his wife Rebecca, have two students in the district.

"The 17-year-old is old enough she can say 'no' when the van pulls up and tells the students to line up and get their vaccine," he said, "But the 10-year-old isn't old enough to stand up for herself yet."

"We don't want our children to get the vaccine," Rebecca added. "I have family and friends who have gotten really sick from them. I don't get a flu shot at all because it makes me sick. We don't want it."

The couple said parents have to sign permission slips for students to go on field trips and attend special events, and believe it is wrong that they could be vaccinated against their parents' wishes.

"I will defer to the superintendent (Marty James), who is not here this evening, but will be in contact with you," Board President Bill Simpson told the Baileys.

Following the meeting, Simpson said the

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Central Montcalm parents ask about vaccine mandate

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school district has no plans to mandate vaccines or masks, and follows the recommendations of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Stanton.

"I don't see us ever mandating vaccines for any stu-

dent," Simpson said.

IN OTHER MATTERS ...

The Central Montcalm Board of Education:

- accepted the resignation of Mikaela Lamb, high school English teacher;

- hired Tony Brace as director of plant maintenance;
- hired Christopher Thompson as plant maintenance;
- hired Tammara VanDop as a part time as a CME para-professional;
- hired Steve Wilson as a middle school student council adviser for the 2021-22 school year.