

Daily News

Monday, January 30, 2023

MID-MICHIGAN DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT (MMDHD)

PUBLIC NOTICE

of

FINANCE COMMITTEE AND REGULAR
BOARD OF HEALTH MEETINGS FOR 2023

Finance Committee meetings held at 8:30 a.m. and Regular meetings held at 9:00 a.m. on the fourth Wednesday of every month.

January 25	Organizational Meeting, Montcalm Office, Stanton
February 22	Clinton Office, Saint Johns
March 22	Gratiot Office, Ithaca
April 26	Montcalm Office, Stanton
May 24	Clinton Office, Saint Johns
June 28	Gratiot Office, Ithaca
July 26	Montcalm Office, Stanton
August 23	Clinton Office, Saint Johns
September 27	Gratiot Office, Ithaca
October 25	Montcalm Office, Stanton
November 22	Clinton Office, Saint Johns
December 20	Gratiot Office, Ithaca

This meeting is open to all members of the public under Michigan's Open Meetings Act. The MMDHD will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired, interpreters, and audio tapes of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities at the meeting/hearing with a one (1) week notice. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the Mid-Michigan District Board of Health by emailing, writing, or calling:

Krishna Santana, Board Secretary
Mid-Michigan District Board of Health
615 N. State St.
Stanton, Michigan 48888-9702
(989) 831-3610
E-Mail: ksantana@mmdhd.org

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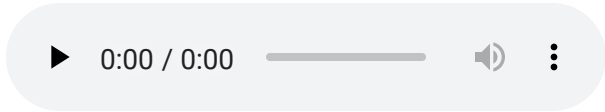
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Health departments eager to reengage with community

DAILY NEWS thedailynews.cc/articles/health-departments-eager-to-reengage-with-community/

By Cory Smith | on February 14, 2023

February 14, 2023



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Liz Braddock, left, and Ionia County Health Department Health Officer Chad Shaw are hopeful that with the end of the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency on May 11, members of the public will return to their local health departments with a renewed focus on the many other programs and offerings made available at each of the respective departments. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

When the coronavirus pandemic arrived in Michigan three years ago this March, resulting in many businesses being required to temporarily shut down and citizens searching for ways to remain safe, one of the busiest agencies working to address those issues were local health departments.

From explaining and enforcing executive orders to offering drive-thru vaccination clinics, employees at the Mid-Michigan District Health Department and the Ionia County Health Department worked endlessly amid an ever-shifting landscape as the pandemic grew and

viruses mutated.

Along with that effort came some public scrutiny, as many residents grew exhausted of mandates and requirements, directing some of that anger at those very health departments.

Today, with President Joe Biden's administration having announced that the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency will end on May 11, the days of enforcing certain pandemic-related requirements are now coming to an end.

For MMDHD Health Officer Liz Braddock and ICHD Health Officer Chad Shaw, that expiration date serves as an indication that, while perhaps unbeknownst to much of the public, local health departments are here to continue to offer a plethora of other services unrelated to the pandemic.

"COVID gave us the image that we're just an organization here to deal with the pandemic, but my children go to school in the county, our staff is from the county — we are part of the community," Shaw said. "Going forward, we're trying to get out of the COVID mindset. So we are starting to see people again, which is great. We are doing more community engagement and we're trying to get to where the people are."

"We still struggle with finance and staffing, but we are doing OK," Braddock added. "We are going back to what we know we are good at doing — focusing on protection, prevention and education."

The MMDHD, with its administrative branch located in Stanton, serves the residents of three counties — Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm — offering a wide range of clinical and environmental services to meet the needs of residents while collaborating with community partners to broaden and strengthen the programs it offers.

From offering health services including dental, hearing and vision screening, HIV and STD testing, immunizations, lead poisoning prevention, reproductive health and substance abuse prevention, as well as environmental health programs centered on clean drinking water, food safety, recalls, septic and recycling, Braddock stressed that the MMDHD exists to help the many communities within its jurisdiction that go well beyond the public perception of simply offering a COVID vaccine.

"We provide services to all the communities, we don't just provide services to those who are below the poverty line," she said. "We work with those who want to open new restaurants and build new homes. If you want a vaccine because you are going on an overseas trip, we help with that. We offer water testing pickups ... We offer so many more services that I think people have forgotten about. We do more than just react to emergencies."

Braddock said overcoming the stigma that came with enforcing restrictions during the pandemic has been difficult, admitting that a number of employees have left the department in the past three years due to mental exhaustion; however, she stressed that the public should be aware that the MMDHD continues to offer these services to anyone in need.

“We are in the community, we are accessible and we have updated our technologies so we people have a better way of contacting us,” she said. “We have a lot of social media posts going out to keep the community updated and educated along with a monthly newsletter.

At the ICHD, which serves Ionia County, Shaw delivers a similar message.

“We’re not there to push the COVID vaccine on people, though that is here for people, but people have to remember other diseases aren’t going away either,” he said.

As an example, Shaw said at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, a large number of children attending school in Ionia County missed their opportunity to receive their required vaccinations, ranging from diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis, polio, measles, mumps and rubella, because they failed to make an appointment at the ICHD.

“Unless you apply for a waiver, it’s important to get caught up on these vaccinations before school starts,” he said. “Anyone can walk in our door for immunizations. If it’s hard to schedule it with your care provider, we have openings most days and walk-in days. That’s an option anyone in the community can use.”

Both Braddock and Shaw have witnessed a decline in clientele who utilize their local health department, even as the pandemic had neared its end, but both health officers are hopeful public interest and trust returns to their respective departments.

“The past few years, we have to seek people out with virtual appointments, which makes it tough,” Shaw said. “When we had people coming in for other programs in person and they found out what else we had to offer, that was great, but when it’s just virtual, they are there just with us for that one meeting. Our goal is to try and get people to use and take advantage of multiple services.”

“We were required to be virtual because our programs are federally funded,” Braddock added. “Now we are just trying to move the health department out of the mindset of a state of emergency phase. We are still under the public health declaration until May, but we are continuing to focus on what we are best at — serving the community and offering services as needed.”

With health emergency requirements coming to an end, Braddock said staff at the MMDHD is now able to refocus its efforts into many of the other programs that it offers.

“It’s hard to get back to some of the services, but we’ve started ramping them up again, like water testing,” Braddock said. “We are starting this in the second year coming up, a program for public beach monitoring. This year we are doing Crystal Lake. We are also placing a focus on harmful algae bloom surveillance for the second year in a row.

“We still do routine food inspections, still going into restaurants, unannounced, twice a year,” she continued. “But what we are really trying to push now is that we are the leader of public health in our communities. If you want information, we keep our website up to date. We have nurses that can answer questions and we can refer you to information on any illness that may be an issue.”

Both Braddock and Shaw stressed that they operate under the county health boards, resulting in direct connections to their jurisdictions.

“We have a good relationship with our Board of Health members,” Braddock said. “If they have constituents that have a concern, they will relay information to us and we meet with the board once a month to listen to and then address those concerns.”

“We go to our county commissioners quite often when issues come up,” Shaw added. “So we have a close bond with our commissioners. In Ionia County, we work closely with the county administrator, Patrick Jordan, and he’s been great to work with.”

While during the pandemic every health department was reacting in a reactive way to the novel coronavirus, Shaw said efforts are being taken once again to be more proactive in the approach to public health.

“We’re now getting more programs that are coming down to us because of emerging issues, whether it’s PFAS or lead in the water, like in Benton Harbor,” he said. “We’re starting to focus on some of these issues whereas before, we were more reactive. Now we are back to being proactive. As sad as it is, we learn from events that happen across the country and state, but that helps build the resources that we have.”

While many employees have left the public health sector due to fatigue from COVID, both Braddock and Shaw said their departments are currently staffed, with cross-training being made available to ensure employees are certified and knowledgeable in their respective positions.

“We’re not always as chaotic as when COVID was happening — this is a great career to go into,” Shaw said. “The joy you get from helping your community out, when you are working for the safety of the people, that’s something that goes a long way.”

“There are 45 health officers in Michigan, but 15 of them — a third of the health officers — left during COVID or since then,” Braddock added. “We want to get the word out that public health is a good career to consider doing and access to education is statewide.”

For more information on the MMDHD or to sign up for the department's newsletter, visit mmdhd.org, or follow the department's Facebook page at facebook.com/MMDHD.

For more information on the ICHD visit ioniacounty.org/health/health-department and to stay up-to-date on local Ionia County health news, consider following the department's Facebook page at facebook.com/people/Ionia-County-Health-Department.