Letter from the President

Welcome to our second 2014 newsletter—just coming a bit late here at the start of 2015! We hope to keep you updated on our latest ALPHA activities and provide you with interesting information from our Board of Directors. It’s been a productive year for ALPHA in updating our website, discussing ways to improve our membership benefits, and preparing for and conducting the 2015 Health Summit. Our next newsletter will share pictures and stories from the memorable annual meeting, held January 27-29 in Anchorage. I’m also excited to share with you our 2015 Annual Report, which you can find on our website. A preview of the report is below!

Sincerely,

Masayo Nishiyama, Alaska Public Health Association Outgoing President
The State of Alaska Section of Public Health Nursing is very pleased to share the announcement of their new Section Chief, Linda K. Worman, D.M., RN. Linda assumed the duties of the position of Chief, Public Health Nursing for the Division of Public Health on September 16, 2014. Linda has been with the Division of Public Health, Section of Public Health Nursing since 2009, starting as the Interior Region Nurse Manager, then as the Assistant Chief of Public Health Nursing. Prior to joining the Division of Public Health, Linda worked in Barrow as a Public Health Nurse and the Public Health Nursing Program Coordinator. As a Public Health Nursing Grantee, the North Slope Borough team provided individual, community, and system public health nursing services. Prior to working in Alaska, Linda worked in the delivery of health care in numerous systems both public and private sector. The areas included maternal-child health, behavioral health, and administration in acute care and community entities. Linda’s knowledge and experience in both clinical care and administration at the local, regional, and statewide levels will serve the Division of Public Health and the State of Alaska well as we all continue to strive to improve the health status of Alaskans.

The State of Alaska Section of Public Health Nursing is also very pleased to share the announcement of their new Deputy Chief Nurse, Tim Struna, MPH, RN. Tim assumed the Deputy Chief Nurse duties and responsibilities on October 1, 2014. Tim has worked with the State of Alaska in a variety of public health nurse positions since 2004, most recently as the South Central Regional Nurse Manager. During Tim’s tenure as a public health nurse in Bethel, as well as in Anchorage, Tim was committed to delivering the full scope of public health nursing services, which included work at the individual, community and system levels. Tim brings a wealth of experience in designing and conducting formal process evaluation in a variety of projects both in the United States and Internationally. His expertise includes integrating public health and nursing best practice, application of qualitative research, analysis of project data, and synthesis of documentation and information to produce comprehensive reports and recommendations.
Alaska has the highest rate of tuberculosis (TB) in the nation, and Alaska Natives continue to be disproportionately burdened by the disease. Through collaboration with community, tribal, and state partners, the Alaska TB Program works toward reducing this disparity and eliminating TB in Alaska. As we know, Alaska has a unique culture and geography, resulting in unique challenges to TB prevention and control. In an effort to understand these challenges and to foster a collaborative relationship between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Alaska TB program, CDC TB program consultant, Derrick Felix, recently visited Alaska.

Alaska TB Program staff, Dr. Michael Cooper and Karen Martinek, oriented Mr. Felix to the Alaska public health infrastructure with a tour of the lab facilities, as well as meetings with the Municipality of Anchorage, Disease Prevention and Control staff and Dr. Jake Gray at the Alaska Native Medical Center. Mr. Felix also had the opportunity to participate in a TB sweep, a targeted TB surveillance strategy, of a local homeless shelter with Municipality of Anchorage public health nurses.

The Alaska TB Program staff accompanied Mr. Felix to Bethel, where they met with leadership and staff from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation and the Bethel Public Health Center. Discussions centered on the geographic barriers faced by rural health systems, particularly as they relate to TB care and case management. Mr. Felix also joined Alaska TB program staff and Bethel public health nurses on a trip to Napakiak, a village about 10 miles from Bethel. There he met with local leaders, toured the new clinic, and learned about the extreme challenges and high cost of living in rural Alaska. He also got a taste of Yup’ik culture with some dried salmon and seal oil.

Not only did this site visit provide an opportunity to communicate Alaska’s unique challenges, it also affirmed the important role of collaboration and partnerships in the prevention and control of TB.

Contributed by Katy Krings, Bethel Public Health Center

Save the Date for the 2016 Alaska Health Summit!

February 2–4, 2016, Captain Cook Hotel, Anchorage
On May 15, 2014, the Alaska Division of Public Health and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium convened 79 people from across Alaska to participate in an assessment of the statewide public health system. Representatives from multiple sectors and geographic regions were brought together to engage in a structured dialogue to evaluate the strengths and identify the gaps of Alaska’s public health infrastructure. Using the National Public Health Performance Standards State Assessment instrument, the day-long event reveals strengths and areas of needed improvement in Alaska’s public health system.

Some of the strengths noted in the report include:

- Alaska rates above the national average in research and innovation.
- Alaska rates above the national average in the enforcement and regulation of public health-related laws.
- Alaska has strong partnerships between Tribal health, the Alaska Division of Public Health, and many private and nonprofit organizations.

Some of the areas that need improvement include:

- Expanding the current work to better address the social determinants of health to impact the root causes of Alaska’s health issues (alcohol and substance abuse, lack of affordable housing, poverty and education).
- Decreasing fragmentation by addressing conditions of health as opposed to siloed, single topic health concerns.
- Increasing accessibility and utilization of data to develop and monitor health programs.

This assessment is being used to:

- Enhance our understanding of Alaska’s unique public health system.
- Provide opportunities to work collaboratively to develop improvement strategies for implementing Healthy Alaskans 2020.
- Provide guidance to key stakeholders and policy makers to strengthen state, regional, and local public health systems for a more integrated, effective system.
- Identify gaps in the public healthy system that can be advanced through quality improvement with key partners.
- Establish a common baseline for all partners with Alaska’s public health system to measure improvement.

Additional information about the assessment, findings and recommendations for future action can be found at: [http://hss.state.ak.us/ha2020/assets/HA2020_2014CCR.pdf](http://hss.state.ak.us/ha2020/assets/HA2020_2014CCR.pdf)
Urgent Call to Prevent HPV-Associated Cancer

Contributed by Stephany Massay, MPH, MT (Alaska Section of Epidemiology Immunization Program)

The Alaska Immunization Program recently received a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) immunization grant to increase Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination coverages rates among adolescents in Alaska. The funding will allow the program to implement a comprehensive communication campaign that targets healthcare providers and the public to inform and educate them about the importance of the HPV vaccine in preventing cancer.

“There are about 12,000 new cervical cancer cases each year in the United States,” said Dr. Melinda Wharton, deputy director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Cervical cancer causes about 4,000 deaths in U.S. women each year. But vaccinating boys and girls against HPV greatly reduces the chances that today’s girls will ever have to face this devastating disease.”

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians recommend HPV vaccination for 11 and 12-year-old girls and boys, as well as for young women ages 13 through 26 and young men ages 13 through 21 who have not yet been vaccinated. Other vaccines recommended specifically for pre-teens include meningococcal conjugate, which protects against bacterial meningitis, and Tdap, which boosts immunity against pertussis (whooping cough). Everyone age six months and older should get an annual flu vaccine.

Healthcare providers and public health professionals across the country are now becoming engaged in a You Are the Key campaign to dramatically increase adolescent vaccination rates against HPV. Three-dose HPV vaccine coverage has stagnated at 32.7% nationally, and many opportunities for vaccination are being missed. For each year that we stay at current vaccination rates, girls and boys will go on to acquire vaccine-preventable cervical, oral, anal, and other HPV-associated cancers.

The Alaska Immunization Program urges all Alaskan healthcare providers to increase the consistency and strength of how they recommend HPV vaccine. Parents interested in vaccinating their adolescent may still have questions about the HPV vaccine. Following is a resource link intended to help healthcare providers with conversations about HPV vaccine: Tips and Time-saver for Talking with Parents about HPV Vaccine [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/for-hcp-tipsheet-hpv.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/for-hcp-tipsheet-hpv.pdf). To learn more, please visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/index.html). Together, we can protect Alaskans from HPV-associated cancers and disease. HPV vaccine IS cancer prevention, and YOU are the key.
Alaska School Environmental Health

Contributed by Ali Hamade and Sandrine Deglin (Environmental Public Health Program, Alaska Section of Epidemiology); Patrick Bloecher and Joy Britt (Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium); Joe Sarcone (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry); and Patricia Owen (Department of Education and Early Development)

Alaska schools employ approximately 18,000 staff including 8,000 teachers that support approximately 131,000 students. These staff and students, comprising roughly 20% of the Alaska population, distributed primarily among Alaska’s 507 public schools in 53 public school districts, spend approximately a fourth of their day in school, mostly indoors. This large fraction of the population should be able to work in a healthy and comfortable environment, which is conducive to learning. This environment can largely be achieved by controlling potential harmful exposures to chemical or biological agents and ensuring good indoor air quality.

There is strong evidence of a link between academic success and health. Students performed better when attending schools that were in good physical condition, pleasant, and having a good environmental health record. Various environmental factors to consider are heavy metals such as lead and mercury, food safety practices, pest and pesticide issues, lighting, playground equipment safety, and noise and temperature, but the most prevalent issues identified in the school environment appear to be related to Indoor Air Quality (IAQ). During 2011, the Environmental Protection Agency partnered with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) to pilot an Environmental Assessment Checklist for Healthy Schools in five Alaska schools. During the assessments, the team noted relevant environmental health issues that included unsafe chemical storage, improperly installed playground equipment, inadequate food holding temperatures, and ventilation issues.

Poor IAQ in the classroom could decrease academic achievement by lowering an individual’s ability to perform mental tasks or by exacerbating respiratory illnesses such as asthma, allergies or infections, hence causing absenteeism (EPA, 2010). School absenteeism could potentially be reduced by simple measures such as ensuring good ventilation of the school buildings, adequate control of humidity and temperature to prevent the formation of mold, and appropriate control and maintenance of storage areas. Proper operation of Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems and other environmental health determinants could be part of a comprehensive IAQ management program following the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) IAQ Tools for Schools framework (EPA, 2014), which provides essential pointers on how to improve IAQ issues at low or no cost, using simple measures accessible to in-house staff. These improvements would likely boost teacher and students productivity as optimal ventilation and temperature in the work place has been associated with higher performance.

The success of a wholesome approach to school environmental health is highly dependent on the involvement of all school personnel, including, the school direction, maintenance personnel, custodial staff, school nurses and teachers as well as parents and the local, state, tribal, federal, and other entities. We encourage those interested in this topic to contact us so that we can start a discussion on the best method to approach an evaluation of environmental health in Alaska schools.

References


Alaska Health Education Library Project

Contributed by Jayne Andreen, Alaska Division of Public Health, Health Promotion Program

Alaska Health Education Library Project
Your Link to Alaska Health Promotion Resources!

www.ahelp.org

The Alaska Health Education Library Project, AHELP, is a centralized link to health promotion and prevention programs and materials that are specifically designed with the uniqueness of Alaska’s health promotion and primary prevention workforce in mind. It includes chronic and infectious disease prevention efforts, as well as behavioral health, violence, injury and suicide prevention work. It is designed to:

- Be a resource on current programs being implemented around Alaska.
- Inspire the Alaskan public health workforce to develop creative ways to meet the health and safety needs of our state.
- Gather information for programs to include in grants and proposals.
- Provide easy access to Alaskan health promotion and primary prevention materials.
- Help connect prevention and promotion staff across the state.

The website is divided into categories to help you get to the information you want quickly. The categories — projects, materials, people, and a calendar of events — are each searchable databases. The tools category includes information and resources on evidence based programs as well as how to be added to the AHELP listserv. Resources include other clearinghouse databases and topics of broad interest.

AHELP is convenient and easy to use! **It is a one-stop location** for finding reliable Alaska specific promotion and prevention information online. AHELP can save you time and money when planning and implementing programs and activities.

You can strengthen Alaska's prevention and promotion work by sharing your programs, materials, and expertise with others around the state. Submit this information directly using the online forms.

For more information visit [http://www.ahelp.org](http://www.ahelp.org) or contact:

Alaska Health Education Library Project (AHELP)

Alaska Division of Public Health

P.O. Box 110610

Juneau, AK 99811-0610

E-mail: ahelprequest@alaska.gov
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The Alaska Public Health Association invites you to partner with us at the **2016 Alaska Health Summit** as a Sponsor and/or Exhibitor. The Summit is one of the largest assemblies of health professionals in Alaska. This partnership assures that health systems, at all levels, evolve to meet the current and future health challenges that Alaska faces. Opportunities include sponsoring keynote speakers, workshops, and general Summit support. To apply to become a sponsor for 2016, please contact alaskahealthsummit@gmail.com.
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