A Season of Service

Commissioner O’Dowd and Secretary of Agriculture Douglas Fisher delivered more than 535 pounds of food to the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties, in Neptune, on Dec. 17. Carlos Rodriguez, the food bank’s executive director (center) was on hand to meet with the cabinet members.

For many New Jersey residents the holiday season is about spending time with family and friends, taking time to reflect on the past and looking ahead to a new year. However, for the more than 1.2 million New Jersey residents who are food insecure, the holidays can be a stark reminder of how difficult it can be to put food on the table.

As a way to help residents who are food insecure in New Jersey and to highlight the issue of hunger, the Departments of Health and Agriculture teamed up to help those in need by hosting a month-long food donation drive. More than 535 pounds of food were donated by employees of both Departments and delivered to the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties. As part of the same drive, food donations were also made to a food pantry in Allentown.

On December 17, Secretary of Agriculture Douglas Fisher and I helped unload a truck containing the donated food at the Food Bank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties. It’s a foodbank that is making a difference in the lives of many residents. Over the last five years, it has provided emergency food to more than 127,000 individuals, an 84% increase compared to 5 years ago. We met with employees and volunteers of the food bank to thank them for their efforts in helping feed the hungry; and we were also able to highlight Governor Christie’s third annual Season of Service Campaign where administration officials volunteer to serve New Jersey’s most vulnerable residents. On Friday, December 20, Deputy Commissioner William Conroy and Chief of Staff Ruth Charbonneau worked at the food pantry in Allentown.

As part of Governor Christie's annual Season of Service initiative, cabinet officials distributed toys as part of the “Toys for Tots” program, renovated houses with Habitat for Humanity, and worked with Good Will to prepare meals for the homeless.

The Season of Service has helped put a focus on the problem of food insecurity in New Jersey. Consider that in the years 2000-2002, 8.5% of the state’s population was food insecure, a decade later, in years 2010 -2012, the number increased to 12.1%. The New Jersey Hunger Prevention Advisory Committee in a 2011 report to the Governor and Legislature found that record numbers of people have been receiving supplemental food through New Jersey’s emergency food provider system, which is comprised of six regional food banks, pantries and soup kitchens. The amount of emergency food distributed in 2006 was 34.8 million pounds; five years later, in 2011, 60.7 million pounds of emergency food were distributed.

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Give Blood and Join the World’s Biggest Huddle At the Final New Jersey Super Community Blood Drive Event

New Jersey’s eight-month Super Community Blood Drive campaign is drawing to a close with the 4th and Goal Blood Drive on January 14, 2014, from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the Sun National Bank Center in Trenton, New Jersey. The campaign, which is being conducted by the Department of Health and the New Jersey Workplace Blood Donor Coalition in partnership with the 2014 NY/NJ Super Bowl Host Committee, has provided a unique opportunity to combine the excitement of the Super Bowl with thousands of workplace and community blood drives leading up to the big game on February 2.

This final drive of the campaign is sponsored by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation. The event will feature live entertainment including “Salutes to the Troops” and a final opportunity for donors to enter a sweepstakes to win a pair of Super Bowl XLVIII tickets.

“This will be the last opportunity of the campaign to raise awareness of the need for blood and to thank volunteers in New Jersey who have donated during the Super Community Blood Drive,” said Health Commissioner Mary E. O’Dowd. “This is a critical time to emphasize the importance of giving blood because donations decrease during the holiday season when people are on vacation and winter weather can interfere with blood drives.”

The NJ Workplace Blood Donor Coalition, co-founded by the Department and Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation, was established in 2008 to increase blood collection in the state and help alleviate New Jersey’s chronic blood shortage. Commissioner O’Dowd and Kevin Rigby, US Country Head and Vice President of Public Affairs for Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation, co-chair the Coalition whose members represent businesses, trade associations, alliances, government agencies, and academic and healthcare institutions.

“Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation is proud to sponsor this final drive of the campaign and to join with our fellow Coalition members to encourage all businesses, community organizations, government entities, and schools to make a commitment to supporting blood donation,” said Kevin Rigby.

One in seven people entering the hospital need blood, according to America’s Blood Centers. Hospitals need blood every day to treat patients for injuries, illnesses and surgeries. Yet often hospitals have less than a two-day supply of blood on hand.

To make the 4th and Goal Blood Drive a special event, former New York Jets Wide Receiver Wayne Chrebet will be on hand to greet donors and sign autographs. The Paper Mill Playhouse Show Choir, entertainer/musician Rich Genoval and comedy singer Joey Vincent will perform for donors during the drive. Raffle prizes donated by the National Football League and the NY/NJ Super Bowl Host Committee will be awarded hourly.

Six New Jersey blood centers will participate in this event. They include the American Red Cross/Penn Jersey Region; the Blood Center of New Jersey, East Orange; Central Jersey Blood Center, Shrewsbury; Community Blood Council of New Jersey, Ewing; Community Blood Services, Montvale; and New Jersey Blood Services, New Brunswick.

To learn more about the Super Community Blood Drive and to register to donate at the 4th and Goal Blood Drive on January 14th, visit the New Jersey Workplace Blood Donor Coalition Website at: www.njsave3lives.com.
Medicinal Marijuana Alternative Treatment Centers Now Open in Northern, Central & Southern Regions

With the opening of Garden State Dispensary in Woodbridge last month, there are now three Alternative Treatment Centers (ATCs) in New Jersey as part of the Department's Medicinal Marijuana Program.

“Patients now have access in all areas of the state with the permitting of the Garden State Dispensary in Woodbridge. There are now ATCs in all three regions of the state-north, central and south,” said Health Commissioner Mary E. O’Dowd.

There are 1,500 patients registered with the program and 250 physicians.

Nearly 500 patients are registered with Garden State Dispensary, which opened on Nov. 22. Nearly 500 additional patients are registered with Compassionate Care Foundation, Inc. of Egg Harbor Township, which opened Oct. 28. Greenleaf Compassion Center in Montclair, which opened a year ago, has 516 registered patients.

Patients can choose any ATC regardless of where they live, but they can only be registered with one ATC at a time. Patients can choose an ATC based on geographic location, quality of service, type of product or any other consideration. There is no cost to change ATC registration and it does not require a new identification card.

A total of 21 different strains are being grown by the three ATCs so patients can choose the product that best works for their debilitating condition.

The Department is working with three other ATCs on successful permitting, according to John O’Brien, Director of the Medicinal Marijuana Program for the past two years. Those ATCs have secured host communities and are in various stages of state review of business plans and personal history disclosure documents of principals.

A webinar guide for physicians is available at http://goo.gl/yLGATn

Additional information about the program, including frequently asked questions, is available at: http://www.state.nj.us/health/medicalmarijuana/index.shtml.

Autism Grant Funding Opportunity

The Governor’s Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism is pleased to announce the availability of Clinical Research and Translational Research Pilot Projects grants to support autism research.

The present configuration of the NJ Autism Center of Excellence includes a Coordinating Center (Montclair State College), three clinical research program sites and six clinical research pilot projects. This recent RFA will potentially expand the Council’s research portfolio by providing up to $4,000,000 to be made available for the Clinical Research and the Translational Research Pilot Projects. Applicants are encouraged to apply for a one-year or two-year award maximum funding up to $200,000 per year. The anticipated start date is June 23, 2014. The offering of grant opportunities for clinical translational research is intended to facilitate translation of research findings that impact patient care as well as examine factors and interventions that have an impact on the health of the population. Applications must be submitted by March 24, 2014. The RFA is available at: http://www.state.nj.us/health/autism/documents/grant/notice_grant_availability2013.pdf

For further information about current grantees, please visit the Council’s web site at the following link: http://www.state.nj.us/health/autism/report.shtml and view under the News category.
Deck the Halls with Prevention and Safety
Help Decrease Holiday Injuries

The holidays are a special time of year, full of family celebrations and good cheer. As the days count down, the hectic nature of preparing for the holidays in addition to the arrival of family and friends takes over. Although the “To Do List” seems to keep growing, be sure to keep “Safety” at the top because of the increased risk for injuries around this time of year. Fortunately, with added awareness and following simple tips, most injuries can be prevented and the holidays can remain joyous and safe for everyone. “The NJ Poison Experts wish you safety and health this holiday season. Let’s make it an injury free one by following our tips below. Prevention is the best gift you can give your loved ones this holiday,” said Bruce Ruck, Director of Drug Information at the NJ Poison Center.

**Alcohol**- If accidentally swallowed by children and/or pets, leftover cocktails can be fatal! Always empty beverage glasses and place them out of reach of curious children and pets.

**Medicines**- Be sure to keep a safe, locked place for relatives and holiday visitors to store any medications they may be carrying with them. Never leave any medications in purses, nightstands, or in the bathroom where they are accessible to children.

**Toy Safety**- Be cautious of antique or foreign-made toys! They may contain lead and be hazardous to children. For Toy Safety call the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772.

**Candles**- Place candles in secure areas where they cannot fall or be knocked over by children and pets. Use non-flammable holders and remember that small amounts of melted wax can become a choking hazard to small children.

Read the full press release at: [http://goo.gl/TAr3D4](http://goo.gl/TAr3D4)
Diabetes Frequency is on the Rise

Diabetes is a common chronic disease in which the body’s inability to produce any or enough insulin causes high levels of glucose, commonly called blood sugar, to build up in the blood. This can lead to serious health problems including diabetes hospitalizations, kidney failure, lower limb amputations, blindness, and death.

According to the Department of Health’s most recent surveillance data released in December 2013, adult diabetes is on the rise in New Jersey. From 1996 to 2010, the estimated rate of new adult diabetes cases in the state more than doubled from 4.6 to 9.5 per 1,000 adults between the ages of 18 and 76.

The important public health message is that diabetes can be controlled and in many cases prevented.

- Weight loss and increased physical activity help prevent or delay the onset of diabetes.
- Prediabetes, a condition in which the blood sugar or A1c level is high but not high enough for diabetes, can be reversed through diet control, physical activity, and weight loss.


Building Healthy Communities Conference

On December 4, 2013, ShapingNJ joined with the New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids, the YMCA State Alliance, Rutgers Cooperative Extension and the American Academy of Pediatrics New Jersey Chapter to host the 2013 Building Healthy Communities Conference. The conference focused on community involvement in preventing chronic disease through policies promoting healthy eating and active living, as well as steps people can take to help maintain wellness.

Department of Health Deputy Commissioner Arturo Brito, MD, MPH, welcomed the speakers and 350 attendees. As a pediatrician, he spoke of the devastating effect of obesity on children, including their increased risk for type 2 diabetes.

Speakers and panelists, that took part in the conference, emphasized the importance of change at the local level for creating healthy environments. They showcased the achievements of local communities and highlighted the role that mayors and municipalities play in advancing public policies that create a culture of health.

Examples of effective policies and programs include:

- Complete Streets, a policy to accommodate all roadway users including walkers, cyclists, and drivers.
- Zoning for mixed use so that residential areas are co-located with shops and other walkable daily destinations.
- Community gardens with gardening classes for participants of all ages to increase access to fresh produce.

For more information on building healthy communities visit: [www.shapingnj.gov](http://www.shapingnj.gov).
Low-Cost Lung Cancer Screenings Available

Lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer-related death in both men and women in the United States. According to the National Cancer Institute, smoking is the biggest risk factor for developing the disease. Aiming to promote the early detection of this disease, the Thoracic Oncology Program at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey has partnered with its flagship hospital Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJUH) and University Radiology to offer $99 lung cancer screenings to the community.

The screening is targeted to those who are at high risk for developing lung cancer due to current or past smoking habits and/or a history of chronic lung disease. Smokers and former smokers over age 50 with 30 or more “pack years” (number of packs of cigarettes smoked per day multiplied by the number of years smoked) are encouraged to participate in this screening.

To make an appointment at University Radiology’s Plum Street location in New Brunswick (or to find other participating locations), call 732-235-5947 or visit http://www.cinj.org/lungcancerscreening to learn more about the program.

Please read more at: http://goo.gl/JdQqpv

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Not surprisingly, healthy eating takes a back seat for the food insecure and research has found that children who have experienced food insecurity as toddlers are 3.4 times more likely to be obese at 4.5 years of age. This is because these children are often eating at irregular times and consuming foods that are neither healthy nor nutritious.

The Department, through ShapingNJ, a public-private partnership of more than 200 organizations that promotes regular physical activity, good nutrition and healthy eating has asked its members to publicize the need for New Jersey residents to donate healthy items to food banks and pantries, as a way to improve the overall health of the food insecure. Additionally, the Department’s Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children provides nutritious foods each month to approximately 167,900 pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants and children.

The Department of Agriculture, that administers the state’s emergency food programs, supports the food insecure in New Jersey through two major programs, the State Food Purchase Program, which provided $6.8 million in funds this year to New Jersey’s six major food banks for the purchase of healthy and nutritious foods; and the Emergency Food Assistance Program, which distributes free federally donated food to New Jersey’s six major food banks.

The State of New Jersey is committed to doing all that is can to assist vulnerable populations and not allowing anyone to slip through its health care safety net; and the Departments of Health and Agriculture are committed to ensuring that everyone in need has access to healthy and nutritious food.

Donating your time and resources can make a major difference in the lives of those in need. I ask everyone to do what they can to help, now and throughout the entire year, often times even small gestures can result in great rewards.

I wish everyone a happy, healthy and safe New Year.
December 3 – Dr. Arturo Brito, Deputy Commissioner, gave remarks at a Columbia University Symposium entitled, “After Super Storm Sandy — Lessons Learned.”

December 4 – Dr. Arturo Brito, Deputy Commissioner, provided welcoming remarks on the Department’s obesity prevention initiatives at the Building Healthy Communities Conference in Edison.

December 5 – Gloria Rodriguez, Assistant Commissioner, gave a presentation on the State of Health in New Jersey, to the New Jersey Society of Public Health Educators in Somerset.

December 6 – Lisa Asare, MPH, Executive Assistant, Public Health Services, delivered the Keynote Address at the annual meeting of the New Jersey Public Health Association. Her remarks focused on non-traditional public health partnerships — lessons learned from Superstorm Sandy.

December 10 – Cathy Bennett, Director of Policy, delivered remarks on the Department’s public health priorities to the Chamber of Commerce, Southern New Jersey, in Voorhees.

December 17 – Commissioner O’Dowd helped deliver food donations to the Food Bank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties as part of the Christie Administration’s third annual Season of Service. The food donations were a result of a month-long food drive conducted by Department of Health and Department of Agriculture employees.

December 17 – Dr. Arturo Brito, Deputy Commissioner, gave remarks on the state’s progress in treating Tuberculosis at the 20th Anniversary of the New Jersey Medical School Global TB Institute in Newark.

December 20 – Bill Conroy, Deputy Commissioner, and Ruth Charbonneau, Chief of Staff, helped deliver food donations to a food pantry in Allentown as part of the Christie Administration’s third annual Season of Service. The food donations were a result of a month-long food drive conducted by Department of Health and Department of Agriculture employees.
Communication, Logistics Key to Successful Vaccination Campaign on Princeton Campus

A well-organized vaccination campaign aimed at reducing the spread of meningitis at Princeton University far exceeded expectations, resulting in 91 percent of eligible University community members receiving the first dose of serogroup B meningococcal vaccine. A total of 5,268 individuals were vaccinated at the University from December 9 through 12.

The University has been experiencing an outbreak since the spring with eight cases of meningococcal disease from March through November. The New Jersey Department of Health, Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), Princeton University officials, and local health officials have been working closely with each other during the outbreak.

In response to the outbreak, the CDC received approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use of a serogroup B meningococcal vaccine at Princeton University, which is only licensed in Europe, Canada, and Australia under an Investigational New Drug application. Undergraduate students, graduate students living in undergraduate dormitories and members of the University community with specific medical conditions were eligible to receive the vaccine.

University officials attributed the success to a strong communication and education effort that included regular email updates to students about the outbreak and vaccination, open forums, posters, table tents, CDC and University webpages dedicated to questions about meningitis and the vaccine, a CDC hotline for questions and a video posted on the University website. The video, co-produced by the Student Health Advisory Board and the University Health Services, featured a University Health Services physician explaining the disease and featuring interviews with four students who described the effects of meningitis and endorsed vaccination. Students also encouraged one another through Facebook postings and photos of a Tiger logo hand stamp students received after being vaccinated.

Princeton University will hold clinics to offer the second dose serogroup B meningococcal vaccine in February.

CDC Warns of Cardiac Deaths from Lyme Disease

Earlier this month, the CDC warned that three people who were unaware they were infected with Lyme disease, and therefore did not seek treatment for the illness, died from sudden cardiac arrest. The deaths occurred from November 2012 through July 2013 in residents of New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

In each case, diagnosis of Lyme disease was made during tissue harvesting for organ donation. Donated corneas from two people who died were transplanted into three recipients before the diagnosis of Lyme disease was made, however no evidence of transmission was found.

Cardiac deaths from Lyme disease are very rare, however, the Department of Health has issued an advisory to local health departments, health care providers, medical examiners and clinical pathologists on the CDC’s findings. The Department is urging residents to take precautions against ticks and seek medical attention if they have any signs or symptoms of Lyme disease.

New Jersey residents can help prevent Lyme disease by avoiding wooded areas and dense shrubs where ticks hide, mowing lawns and trimming trees; and wearing solid and light colored clothing that makes it easier to find a tick on your clothing. For more on Lyme disease and its prevention, please visit: http://goo.gl/XwrqW.

The full CDC report can be found at: http://goo.gl/vpW0QY.
Cervical Cancer: One of the Deadliest but Most Preventable Cancers

According to the National Cancer Institute, cervical cancer is the third most common cancer in women worldwide. Virtually 100 percent of cervical cancer cases are caused by infection by high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV infection of the genital tract is common—individuals are exposed to the virus during any kind of sexual contact, but transmission is higher with sexual activity as a teenager and a greater number of lifetime sexual partners. Once HPV infects cells, it can interfere with cell regulation and lead to abnormal growth. While HPV can cause varying medical problems, like genital warts, the most serious health concern is the development of precancer (also known as dysplasia) or cancer of the cervix, which is caused by the high-risk HPV types. Risk factors that further increase the chance of HPV causing cervical cancer include cigarette smoking and compromise of the immune system as in the case of co-infection with HIV or use of immunosuppressive medical treatments.

The Importance of Pap Smears
Fortunately, in the U.S., the incidence of cervical cancer has decreased significantly over the last 50 years. The first breakthrough in cervical cancer prevention was the adoption of the Pap smear for screening. The Pap smear is a test conducted during a pelvic examination in which cells are gently brushed off the cervix and analyzed under a microscope to look for abnormal cells. More recently, we can also check for the presence of the high-risk HPV types in these cells. The results of these two screening tests allow clinicians to detect pre-cancer before it progresses to cancer or find cancer at an early, curable stage. Widespread screening and subsequent diagnosis of pre-cancer/early cancer has led to a dramatic drop in cervical cancer rates and deaths in developed countries. However, many women in the U.S. still do not get recommended screening and later develop advanced-stage cervical cancer. All women should start getting Pap smears and/or HPV testing at age 21. A woman should consult with her doctor about the frequency of screening, as it depends on age and results from prior tests.

The HPV Vaccine
A recent important discovery in preventing cervical cancer is the HPV vaccine. Normally the immune system helps guard against infections, but sometimes HPV can escape this kind of attack. The current commercially-available vaccine helps the body mount a stronger immune response when first exposed to four of the most common HPV types to prevent infection of the cervical cells. Vaccination is recommended for all females aged 9 to 26 and involves completing the full series of three injections over six months. Vaccination does NOT mean that a woman can stop getting Pap smears since the vaccine does not 100 percent guarantee against cervical cancer.

Prevention is Key
Remember, by quitting smoking, vaccinating against HPV when age appropriate, undergoing regular Pap smears and protecting yourself against sexually-transmitted diseases, you can help reduce your risk to developing cervical cancer.