

December 2020

# PULSE

A look at what keeps IDOH ticking

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### FUN FACT

Americans eat more than 22 million pounds of turkey each holiday season.



**Indiana Department of Health**

**Mission:**  
To promote, protect, and improve the health and safety of all Hoosiers.

## We're making history together

If you'd asked me a year ago what I hoped 2020 would bring, I can guarantee that a global pandemic wouldn't have been on the list.

Life, however, is full of surprises, and that's exactly what 2020 has delivered.

As I reflect on all that 2020 has put on our plates, both personally and professionally, I find myself dealing with many emotions. There is grief for all that we've lost this year – time with family and friends, loved ones who are no longer here, that feeling of normalcy that I hope we never take for granted again. But there is also immense pride in all that we have accomplished, in how so many of you have stepped outside your comfort zones time and time again to take on new roles and help us accomplish what often feels like the impossible.

There's no question that this has been one of the hardest years on record, not just for us here at IDOH, but for Hoosiers in every corner of the state. But as 2020 comes to a close, I can't help but add excitement and hope to that mix of emotions. Excitement to see us start to put the first vaccine in the arms of Hoosiers. Hope that the arrival of vaccine truly signals the beginning of the end of this pandemic. Hope that



**Kris Box, MD, FACOG**

2021 will see the return of family reunions, graduation celebrations, homecoming dances, stadiums filled with fans, and visits with our treasured older relatives.

We still have a long road to travel to get to that point. Vaccine will be rolled out in phases, so it could be another six months before we are able to vaccinate the majority of our population. I know that seems daunting, especially when so many members of our team have already given 200 percent effort with little relief. But when you have traveled a long journey and see your destination in sight, it's important to keep your foot on the gas. Tired or not, we can't and won't turn back now, because the reward at the end is well worth the journey.

When historians look back on this time in our lives, I hope they will focus on how public health rose to the challenges presented by this pandemic. What you all are doing is arguably the most important thing we will ever do for every Hoosier.

So as you reflect on all that 2020 has brought, remember this: What you do matters. You matter. And I could not be more blessed than to have this team answering the call.

I wish you and yours a very blessed holiday season.

**Yours in health,  
Kris**

## IDOH rolls up sleeves for vaccine rollout

The arrival of the first COVID-19 vaccines was met this year with cheers and tears of relief from frontline healthcare workers and our own public health warriors, who have been fighting tirelessly to protect Hoosiers from COVID-19 nearly all year.

Nearly every division, from Immunizations and Emergency Preparedness to Long-term Care and the

Labs, has been touched.

As 2020 closes, we look to 2021 and the promise that the vaccines coming out will help us put this pandemic behind us. But it's also time to reflect on the incredible work done to get us to this point, from building testing to putting shots in arms.

"We've planned, trained and exercised mass vaccination every year," said

Emergency Preparedness Director Megan Lytle.

"We've spent years practicing, challenging ourselves and identifying gaps. We are ready."

The first vaccine to arrive was made by Pfizer, and a Moderna vaccine is in the pipeline and could receive an Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA as early as this

◆ See **VACCINE** on page 4

# Spotlight

## Behind the numbers at the IDOH Laboratory

In January 2020, when novel coronavirus first began making headlines, the IDOH Laboratory knew it was coming our way. We started preparing our response and laid out a laboratory incident command structure that consisted of testing method verification, Laboratory Information System (LIMS) connectivity, testing teams, and laboratory outreach team.

After watching the popular TV series "CSI," it is easy to imagine that testing is easy and quick. In reality, testing includes a long list of supplies, considerations and tasks – ordering the reagents and supplies; bringing up new assays and corresponding LIMS; aliquoting lysis buffer; unloading specimens from a courier van on often cold and windy days; moving carts with stacked grid boxes and squeezing through narrow doors; cata-



**Lixia Liu, PhD,  
D(ABMM)**  
**Assistant Commissioner,  
Laboratory  
Services Commission & State Lab  
Director**

logging and counting specimens; logging specimens to the LIMS; building runs; extracting nucleic acids; running PCRs; countless pipetting steps in between; analyzing data; reviewing and releasing results; storing boxes of specimens; bagging and removing bins of biohazard wastes.

Only after all these steps are complete can results be sent to submitters and patients.

On Feb. 29, we tested the first COVID specimen, and on March 5 we detected the first positive case of COVID-19 in Indiana. Our testing throughput was limited initially due to the laborious manual extraction process and reagent shortage. To increase our capacity, we extended our hours to seven days a week; brought in high throughput instruments (Buttercup, Bubbles and Blossom are among the new additions we've named).

We pulled in lab techs, analysts and supervisors from the Virology/Serology, Emergency Preparedness, Clinical Micro and Environmental Micro divisions; we tapped into QA, LIMS teams and the Chemistry Division. Our testing capacity

*"Each result contains the dedication and sacrifices of the COVID Team, who are here regular hours, afterhours, weekends, holidays, whatever it takes."*

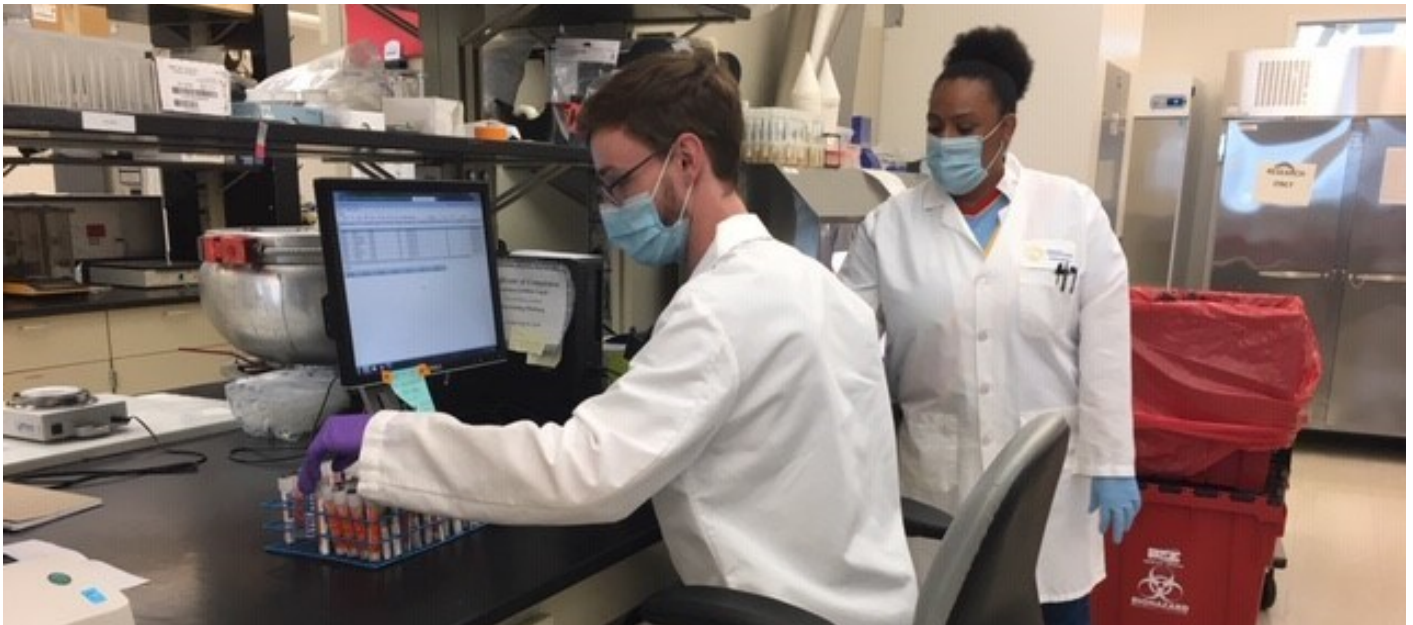
increased from the teens in early March to more than 2,000 COVID-19 PCR results daily, and aiming at 3,000 per day.

We have reported more than 140,000 COVID testing results from our lab so far. Each result contains the dedication and sacrifices of the COVID team, who are here regular hours, afterhours, weekends, holidays, whatever it takes. The team members' responses to the question of "how are you holding up?" reflect their passion for public health.

"We are like trained soldiers. We don't want to have a war, but when war comes, we want to be in the fight."

"This is what we are here for."

We were here in January to strategize; we are still here fighting in December; and we will be here to see the COVID-19 pandemic subside!



Kyle Brownlee (left) and Jennine Griffith-Vandi, both microbiologists at the IDOH Laboratory, handle test specimens. They are one of many steps in a testing process that works because of the combined efforts of IDOH employees from every corner of the agency.

## Chief Medical Officer raises money for local dance studio

Our chief medical officer, Dr. Lindsey Weaver, MD FACEP, was recently given the opportunity to participate in "Shall We Dance," a dance competition to raise money for the local dance studio Dance Kaleidoscope.

Dr. Weaver won first place after raising \$2,200 for Dance Kaleidoscope with her performance. She performed a jazz-style dance to the classic Christmas song "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree," filmed on location at the Indiana Statehouse rotunda. She said she wanted to do something festive and uplifting and hopefully put a smile on the faces of those who watched it.

Dr. Weaver was one of six contestants in this year's competition. The contestants were filmed in advance, and videos were posted online for the audience to view due to COVID-19. Other contestants included an IMPD police officer, a kindergarten music teacher, a high school teacher, a choir director and a middle school teacher. The theme was "Dancing With Our Heroes."

"I love the arts, especially the performing arts. I am a huge fan of musicals, live theater and dance. It is a reflection of ourselves, of our feelings and experiences," said Dr. Weaver. "It is also an escape, which I think we could all use a little of these days. The artists have worked to continue practicing their craft, performing and entertaining in creative ways through COVID-19. I was very excited to be able to support them!"

For more information about the Shall We Dance Competition, visit <https://dancekal.org/features/events/shall-we-dance-2020-dec-10-13>. There, you will find links to all of the competitors' dances, including Dr. Weaver's.



Chief Medical Officer Lindsay Weaver, MD, FACEP, earned 1st place in the Dance Kaleidoscope "Shall We Dance" Competition, after raising \$2,200 for the local dance studio with her jazz dance to "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree."

## Labor of Love summit leaps into virtual world

It's been a year like no other, forcing us to adapt to challenge after challenge and find new ways to carry on our vital missions. This year's Labor of Love infant mortality summit was no exception.

For the first time in its eight-year run, the summit was held virtually. A studio was set up at the JW Marriott, where Dr. Box and key IDOH staff helped guide speakers, both in-person and virtually, through a robust program designed to help further our work to improve the health of Indiana moms and babies.

The theme of this year's summit was "Delivering Health for Life," reflecting the importance of good health at any age and the impact that health choices have on protecting Indiana's most vulnerable populations.

More than 1,000 people registered to hear inspiring messages from speakers focusing on topics ranging from health disparities to adverse childhood experiences and how to break the cycle of poor health and poverty among adolescent mothers and their children.

"The Labor of Love summit is our marquis event to showcase the priority we place on helping Indiana

◆ Continue to LABOR, page 4

## Beware of Cyber Attacks

State employees are receiving phishing messages from different email addresses. Some of these email addresses are impersonating email addresses from different government agencies nationwide or from external countries.

Do not click or download any files seen on any message from an unknown/untrusted sender.

If you believe that the message is legitimate, please contact the sender at their valid and confirmed office number and confirm the accuracy of the message before clicking on any links or downloading any attachments seen on these emails.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Technology and Compliance.



◆ **VACCINE, continued from page 1**

weekend.

If you aren't directly involved with the vaccine effort, you can still help spread the word.

We have built a vaccine-specific website, [www.coronavirus.in.gov/vaccine](http://www.coronavirus.in.gov/vaccine), which is being updated daily as new information becomes available. The site includes FAQs, information on the vaccines, and even dispels common myths (no, the vaccine does not contain a microchip!).

As public health employees, you can help be our ambassadors to educate Hoosiers about the vaccine's safety and efficacy. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to get the facts about the vaccine, so that when supplies increase and it's widely available, we can vaccinate as many Hoosiers as possible.

The vaccine is the light at the end of the tunnel. As Dr. Box has said, we still have a journey ahead of us. But we can see our destination.

"I am proud of my team beyond words," Lytle said. "When the job is done and we have herd immunity, folks can go back to their family and friends that maybe they haven't seen in a long time — all due to this vaccine."

## Big Updates to IDOH Policies Coming January 1st!

IDOH's policies and procedures are reviewed and updated annually. Not only are we updating our policies for 2021 with changes to laws, regulations, and new directives that are critical to our work, but we are also giving them a new look to match our agency-wide branding. Policies are managed through the use of MediaLab, IDOH's on-line document management system. They are accessible on the Nerve Center at the following link:

<https://www.in.gov/isdh/thenervecenter/2458.htm>.

IDOH requires that all of us are familiar with and abide by current policies, so please allow yourself adequate time to read them. The policies cover a wide range of topics such as personal use of state property, HIPAA, health equity, work schedules and compensatory overtime. There are more than 31 policies in all.

Make sure to look at the Agency Policy Management policy that became effective just this year. This policy addresses how we manage the lifecycle of our policies, maintain compliance with laws, ensure that we support meaningful and equitable access to the CDC's Essential Public Health Services, and comply with the agency's Health Equity policy. The 10 Essential Public Health Services provide a framework for public health to protect and promote the health of all people in all communities. For more information, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/publichealthservices/essentialhealthservices.html>.

Lastly, watch for a couple of new policies coming your way in 2021. There will be a new Language Access Policy, a new Health Equity Policy, and new or revised policies from Human Resources and the Office of Legal Affairs. The new IDOH Policy Template is found on the Nerve Center under the Office of Public Affairs at <https://www.in.gov/isdh/thenervecenter/2715.htm>.

For questions on policies, compliance or MediaLab, please contact Barb Killian, at [bkillian@isdh.in.gov](mailto:bkillian@isdh.in.gov).

◆ **LABOR, continued from page 3**

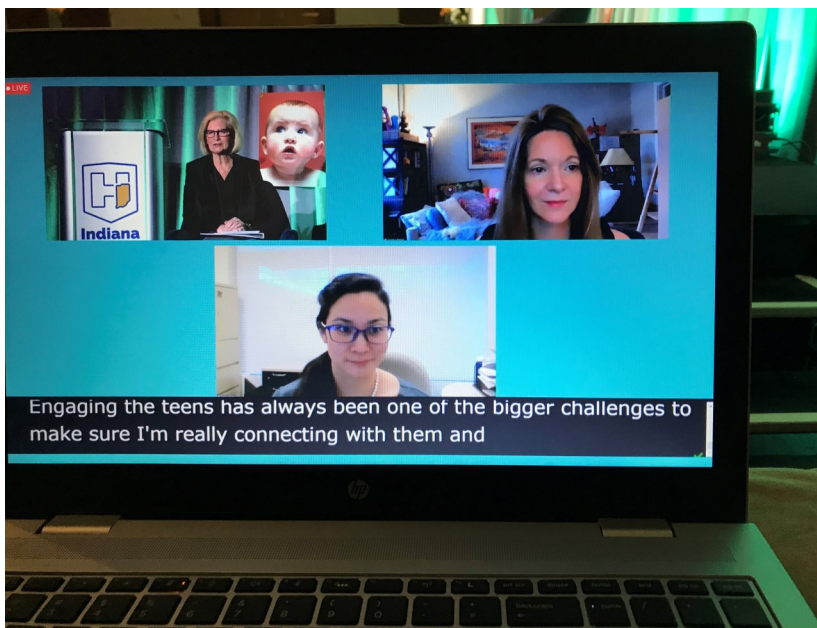
babies live to their first birthdays. We are seeing incredible results in our efforts to reduce our infant mortality rate, and we weren't going to let the pandemic get in the way of that progress," said Maternal and Child Health Director Eden Bezy.

Since 2016, our statewide infant mortality rate has fallen from 7.5 per 1,000 live births to 6.5 per 1,000 births. That translates to nearly 100 babies celebrating their first birthdays who might not otherwise have reached that milestone.

We also are making progress on the significant disparities in our infant mortality rates.

In 2017, our non-Hispanic Black infant mortality rate stood at 15.4 per 1,000 births. In 2019, that had dropped to 11 per 1,000 births. While the rate is still higher than the statewide rate, that represents a significant decrease and shows that our programs are getting the right messaging to the right people.

We still have work to do in this area, because Black infants continue to represent more than



20 percent of our infant deaths. But through partnerships and efforts like Labor of Love, we will get there!

Thank you to the entire team that invested so much in making this year's event an unparalleled success.

## Accreditation journey continues

Accreditation is never-ending. Patricia Truelove, IDOH accreditation coordinator, is working on gathering the remaining documents for submission back to our site visitors in response to the Action Report received back in June. After IDOH achieves status as an accredited state health department, we will continue to work with PHAB annually until our renewal application in five years. Documents provided will still need to meet best practices. Below are some of these key items we will continue to be evaluated on.

Are you doing the following?


- Presentations
- Agendas
- Meeting Minutes
- Sign-in Sheets
- E-mails

**LOGO on Docs**




- Promotional Materials
- Fact Sheets
- Brochures
- Hand-outs in meetings

**Date MM/YY**



- Agenda
- Invite
- Meeting Minutes
- Sign-in

**Meetings**



- Development of strategies
- Development of promotional materials
- Changes in policy or services

**Community Involvement**




### Deadline approaching to claim your e-gift card!

You have until 11:59 p.m. on Dec. 31 to redeem any e-gift cards you earned this year from ActiveHealth before the portal resets for the 2021 program on Jan. 1. State employees who completed a biometric screening were eligible.


### Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging



**Course Summary:** Diversity is having a culture that values uniqueness: people of different backgrounds, cultures, genders, and races. Inclusion means inviting diverse groups to take part in company life. If you're tuned into conversations about HR, you've probably heard these terms before. But there's a third critical piece: belonging. It's belonging that makes each individual feel accepted for who they are. Explore the diversity, inclusion, and belonging (DIB) approach, and discover how to activate it in your organization.

**Time: 47 minutes**

[Click here to access the program](#)



Check out courses to aid in your professional development!

Have you accessed LinkedIn Learning yet?

If not, check out this easy-to-follow [login guide](#).

## Can you eat healthy during the holidays?

Yes, it can be done, and it can be delicious! Luckily, it doesn't have to be difficult to find the recipes. The USDA has taken the time to compile healthy recipes for all of your favorite festive treats and put them in one location. For more information, Please visit <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/nutrition-education/healthy-thrifty-holiday-menus/christmas>.



### Employee Assistance Program

The COVID-19 pandemic has added stress to many people's lives, and IDOH wants to remind everyone that free resources are available. Just having someone to talk to can help you cope when it all seems too much, whether the stress comes from home, work or all of the above.

Visit the [Anthem EAP](#) website to get started! Once on the homepage, click the "Members Login" button on the left-hand side of the page. The next page will ask you to enter your company name, which is "State of Indiana." Once you've hit the "Log In" button, all of these services are open to you.

To connect via phone, call 1-800-223-7723 and select option 1. This will get you connected to a trained EAP representative. The representative will then help you find a therapist who fits your specific situation and will even assist you in scheduling your initial appointment.



### Haley Hannant

**GUESS WHO I MET ON THE ELEVATOR?**



**Title:** Infant Mortality Epidemiologist

**Brief Job Description:** Haley analyzes birth and infant death records. From those records, she produces annual reports detailing the Indiana infant mortality rate (IMR) by race/ethnicity, location and cause of death, as well as summarizing birth outcomes such as pre-term births, low birthweight births, and early prenatal care.

**Time at IDOH:** 1.5 years

**What do you like most about working at IDOH?**

"Feeling like I can truly help improve the landscape of maternal and child health across Indiana and working with a team that is so passionate about the work that we do."

**Other information:** "I LOVE to read! I read over 200 books each year."

## Staffing updates

Welcome to the following staff members who joined the Indiana Department of Health in December:

Jaxon Pridgen, microbiologist, IDOH Lab; Eric Dulin, public health nurse surveyor, Acute Care; Toni Maley, medical surveyor, LTC; Micha Burkert, assistant deputy director of legislative and external affairs, Office of the Commissioner; Patricia McQueen, public health nurse surveyor, Acute Care; Holley Rose, local emergency ops supervisor, Emergency Preparedness; Kiara Stutts, epidemiologist, ERC; Shirley Dubois, public health administrator, Tobacco Prevention.

Melissa Layman was promoted to public health administrator. Alpa Mistry was promoted to state program director.

We also celebrate our 2020 Governor's Long-Term Reception Honorees.

Lisa Hensley, an administrative assistant with Program Performance and Development, celebrates her 40th year with IDOH.

Kelly Ezell, an accountant in our finance department; Cindy Lawrence, early intervention coordinator at the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education; Lisa McColly, program coordinator, Acute and Continuing Care; David Nauth, division director, Radiology and Weights and Measures; Mark Starzynski, chemist supervisor at the IDOH Lab; Linda West, program specialist, Children's Special Health Care; and Ken Ziegler, medical surveyor, Acute and Continuing Care, all celebrate 35 years

[indianamuseum.org](http://indianamuseum.org)



[Click here for information on Winter Break Camp opportunities for your children!](#)