

January 2021

PULSE

A look at what keeps IDOH ticking

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

◆ Radon Awareness Month	2
◆ New Years Resolutions	3
◆ Be Well Helpline	3
◆ Policy Updates	4
◆ Introducing the Shield Spotlight	5
◆ Look Who I Met in the Elevator	6
◆ Staff updates	6



FUN FACT

“Laughing 100 times is equivalent to 15 minutes of exercise on a stationary bike.”

[-University of Queensland](#)



**Indiana
Department
of
Health**

Mission:

*To promote, protect,
and improve the health*

New year brings with it hope

Happy New Year!

I can say without a doubt that 2021 is off to a brisk start. After running a marathon for close to a year – often at a sprinter’s pace -- would we have expected anything else?

But there’s a different feel to this leg of the race. It’s the excitement that comes with seeing hundreds of thousands of Hoosiers sign up to get the COVID-19 vaccine – nearly 600,000 in the first month! It’s hearing the stories of our seniors bursting into tears of joy as they receive their first dose because it signals a return to hugging their grandchildren or even, as one 100-year-old Hoosier told us, getting back to cocktail hour. It’s the relief we’re seeing on the faces of our healthcare workers, knowing they can continue their important work without worrying if today is the day they bring the virus home to their families.

The work that’s being done right now is on a scale none of us have ever seen. We started by vaccinating at 55 hospitals, then added 91 local health departments and two pharmacies. Additional hospitals and pharmacy chains like Kroger, Meijer and Walmart are coming on board, while we are also expanding the capacity at



**Kris Box,
MD, FACOG**

existing sites. In just three days over a recent weekend, our team expanded the number of available appointments by nearly 55,000.

Still, the demand vastly outstrips the supply of vaccine.

I hear daily from groups that want to be next. Each of them is worthy of having this potentially life-saving vaccine. And our goal is to get a vaccine to every Hoosier who wants one as quickly as possible.

When that happens depends on how much vaccine we can get from the federal government. Rest assured that we are ready for that day.

Until then, please continue to be ambassadors for vaccine education. Despite the high number of Hoosiers who want a vaccine today, we know that many others are hesitant, for reasons that range from perceptions that the vaccine was developed quickly to deeply rooted historical distrust. We will continue to provide accurate, culturally sensitive information so that every Hoosier has the information needed to make the choice that’s right for them.

Thank you for truly being the heroes to so many.

**Yours in health,
Kris**

COVID-19 precautions slow spread of flu, colds

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States has recorded just over 1,000 cases of influenza since September 2020.

During the same time period last winter, the country recorded over 65,000 cases of the flu. But in the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot about the way that people act to prevent the spread of disease. Precautions like wearing

masks, taking extra care when washing hands, and keeping activities outdoors and at a distance from others have all been implemented to slow the spread of COVID-19. The same measures may have stymied the spread of influenza and other seasonal viruses.

America is not alone in the phenomenon. Countries across the Northern Hemisphere are seeing a quiet flu season. In England, flu cases are about

one-twentieth of the usual cases at this time of year. The Southern Hemisphere saw a similar phenomenon between June and August, when influenza cases usually peak, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in September.

“Things like social distancing, wearing masks in public, and being extra mindful of the importance of washing hands are

◆ **FLU, continued on page 4**

Spotlight

January is Radon Awareness Month

For Radon Awareness Month, Diabetes Education Coordinator Brenda Jagatic has a story to share. She shares it because she is especially aware of the dangers of radon, and because she hopes that informing others about what happened to her family will help them become more proactive in preventing dangerous levels of radon exposure in the home. Taking her story seriously could even save lives.

Radon is a cancer-causing, radioactive gas that can be found all over the United States. It comes from the natural radioactive breakdown of uranium in soil, rock and water and gets into the air we breathe. Radon tends to accumulate in enclosed structures, so it is a particular problem in homes. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer (it is the leading cause among nonsmokers), and it is responsible for roughly 21,000 lung cancer deaths every year nationwide. In cases where radon levels reach more than 20 picocuries per liter of air, the risk of death by lung cancer, among nonsmokers, is 35 times more likely than that of death by drowning, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In January 2013, Brenda's husband, Frank, was diagnosed with stage 4 non-

small cell lung cancer with metastasis to the brain. "It made no sense," said Brenda. "We knew smoking was the number one cause of lung cancer and Frank did not smoke. Frank and I learned that radon was the number two cause of lung cancer. We subsequently connected the dots and realized Frank's cancer was the result of elevated radon levels in our home. He died a year later at age 53."

Several years earlier, when they purchased their home, they were informed that radon testing was a requirement for the sellers of the home they were buying. Because the radon levels were elevated, the seller was required to mitigate the radon. Despite being well-educated individuals, Brenda and Frank did not seek out further information. Unfortunately, they were not aware of the health risks associated with elevated levels of radon.

Later, her husband turned off the fan in their attic when they had a new roof installed, which they later discovered was part of the radon mitigation. The fan was not turned back on afterward. Then, during a heavy rainstorm, they unsealed their sump pump to make sure it was working correctly and prevent any flooding in the basement. Again, they had no idea the sealing of the sump pump was part of the radon mitigation.

In May 2013, after he completed his aggressive combination chemotherapy and radiation therapy, Frank decided he wanted to sell their house and move to Indianapolis so Brenda would be close to their eldest daughter after he died.

They arranged for radon testing prior to putting their house up for sale. The radon tester told them that the seal on the sump pump was part of the radon mitigation. "She informed us she would not test our house for radon until our sump pump was correctly re-sealed," said Brenda. "She also told us that a house in our neighborhood had had the highest radon level she ever encountered in her entire career."

Frank Jagatic passed away one year after his diagnosis, and Brenda contacted the county health department the following month to request a copy of his death certificate.

Brenda's daughter reviewed the additional documents and discovered an error: question number 31 asked "Did Tobacco Use Contribute to Death?" There were four options to answer this question: Yes, Probably, No and Unknown. The coroner checked "Yes."

Brenda believes this is largely due to a simple lack of awareness about the risk of lung cancer due to radon exposure. "To this day I wonder if other coroners, completing a death certificate for an individual who died from lung cancer, makes the assumption the deceased was a smoker."

Brenda wants more people to be aware of the dangers of radon so they don't have to go through what her and her family have endured. There are ways to reduce your chances of getting lung cancer from radon exposure.

- Test your home for radon and reduce high levels.
- Be aware that if you smoke and your home has high radon levels, the risk of lung cancer is especially high.

For more information on the dangers of radon and how to protect yourself and your family, click [here](#) to visit the IDOH Radon webpage.

Thank you, Brenda, for sharing such a personal story.



Diabetes Education Coordinator Brenda Jagatic (far right) with her late husband, Frank, and daughters Christina and Alana,

Make a New Year's resolution to quit smoking, and stick to it!

We have entered a new year and a time to really think about goals you would like to achieve — especially if you use tobacco products and want to quit.

More than half of all New Year resolutions fail, but that doesn't have to happen to you! One of the main reasons a resolution may not be accomplished is because the goal is not thought through well enough, or realistically able to be achieved. But you can avoid these pitfalls and make your goals happen with a solid plan in place.

First, identify the right resolution to improve your life, then create a plan on how to reach it. Follow these simple steps to help set a goal for 2021:

Write down your goal. Use the SMART method.

Specific – Your resolution should be 100 percent clear. For example, if you are wanting to quit smoking, instead of saying “my goal is to quit smoking,” be more specific. How long are you giving yourself to kick the habit?

Measurable – Define what evidence will prove that you are making progress and reevaluate when necessary.

Achievable – Make sure you can reasonably accomplish your goal within a certain timeframe.

Relevant – Your goals should align with your values and long-term objectives.

Time-based – Set a realistic end date for task prioritization and motivation.

You can make your resolution easier to achieve by developing micro goals. A small change to a current habit might make more sense than setting a large goal that is unrealistic. If you smoke cigarettes, for instance, try smoking less and less each week, until quitting altogether is less of a drastic change.

There are resources to help you quit smoking right here at IDOH.

“The Indiana Tobacco Quitline launched our [Individual Services program](#) in August, so there are many choices a person has to start their quit journey and we can meet them where they are in their journey,” said Tobacco Prevention Communications Coordinator Christine Coverstone. “The year 2020 was pretty stressful for many Hoosiers, and there are so many reasons to improve or maintain your health. This is a perfect time to quit, because it's never too late to quit tobacco use,”

Smoking takes the lives of approximately 11,100 Hoosiers each year and costs Hoosiers an estimated \$2.93 billion annually in healthcare costs. As stewards of public health in Indiana, we owe it not only to ourselves and our families to quit, but to those who look to us to set the example.

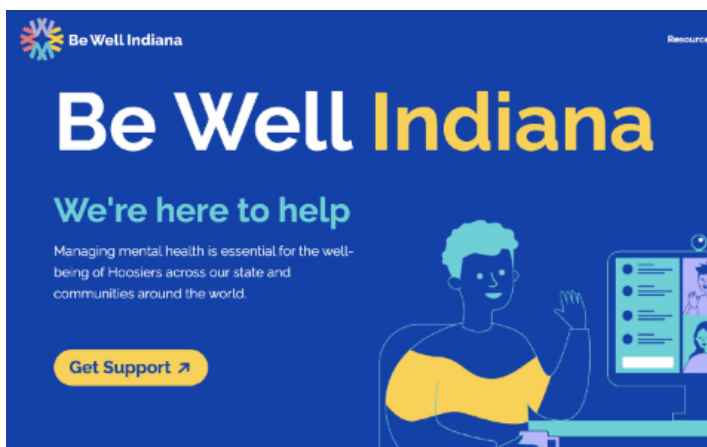
For more information on how smoking affects Hoosiers or for help quitting, [click here for more information](#).

Be Well Crisis Helpline answers the call for Hoosiers in need

The Be Well Crisis Helpline recently passed an important milestone as it enters its sixth month of operation.

The free service was launched in July to support the mental health needs of Hoosiers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The service has answered more than 6,000 calls for help as it continues to provide 24/7 access to experienced and compassionate counselors, specially trained to help with the personal challenges that have come along with this pandemic.

To date, the Be Well Crisis Helpline has answered 6,049 calls, with an average talk time of 18 minutes and 10 seconds, but with an average wait time of only 16 seconds. To reach a counselor, anyone in Indiana can simply call 2-1-1, enter their ZIP code, and follow the prompts to reach the [Be Well Crisis Helpline](#).



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 have any questions or concerns regarding the messages you are receiving, feel free to send me the message, and I'll gladly review it for you.

If you believe that the message is legit, 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.



♦ FLU, continued from page 1

helping to slow the spread of influenza for the exact same reasons it helps slow the spread of COVID-19," said Deputy Health Commissioner and State Epidemiologist Pam Pontones. "If we expose each other less, then disease can't spread as effectively. It's easy to see how it's worked."

Aside from these precautions, Hoosiers all over the state are waiting for their turn to receive the COVID vaccine, many with the hope that Indiana can return to a state of pre-COVID-19 normalcy. If that comes to pass, and by this fall Hoosiers stop practicing social distancing and wearing masks in public, Indiana could see a resurgence of flu next season.

"The best way to prevent influenza is to get vaccinated," said Immunizations Director Dave McCormick. "Everyone 6 months of age and older should receive a flu vaccine to be properly protected from seasonal influenza and other respiratory illnesses."

Flu season typically runs through May, so there's still a chance that flu cases will pick up in the next few months. Also, one strain of flu — influenza B — tends to circulate later in the season. So it is not too late for Hoosiers to benefit from getting a flu vaccine if they haven't already.

Pontones recommends continuing prevention methods to protect against the flu and COVID-19, as well as getting the flu vaccine. "The flu vaccine takes about two weeks for antibodies to develop and begin protecting you from the illness, so getting the flu vaccine any time through mid-April will still be helpful in preventing the flu," she added.

Anyone who hasn't already received their flu vaccination should do so as soon as possible, but keep in mind that 14 days must elapse between getting the COVID-19 vaccination and any other vaccinations, including the flu vaccine.



Big updates to IDOH policies this month!

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. More than 31 policies in all.

Make sure to look at the Agency Policy Management policy that became effective 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.



Fighting Gender Bias @ Work

Whether deliberate or unconscious, bias makes it harder for women to get hired and promoted and negatively impacts their day-to-day work experiences. Created by LeanIn.Org, this short video series—one introductory video and six two-to-three-minute videos—is designed to provide an understanding of how gender bias impacts women's and men's experiences at work.

Time: 14 minutes

Click [here](#) to access the program

IDOH introduces new employee recognition program

Your leadership is excited to announce a new, peer-driven, employee recognition program called the Shield Spotlight.

If you know people who you think should be recognized, just [click here](#) and enter them to be recognized for any one of five different awards. These awards include an Award for Excellence, Personal Achievement Award, Team Player Award, Customer Service Award, or Workplace Milestone Award.

Teams can be given the same awards as individuals as well. If you see a section or team going above and beyond, please feel free to nominate them, too.

Those awarded will be featured on the Nerve Center, as well as on the IDOH LinkedIn page. IDOH wants to recognize the amazing things our hard-working employees do to protect the public health of Hoosiers everywhere.

The below image is a general template. We would love to see you and your peers on this award, but this is only possible with employee participation. Visit the [Shield Spotlight webpage](#) and make your nominations today!



Employee Assistance Program

Phone: (800) 223-7723 (24/7 support)

Access eight free face-to-face counseling sessions. Select option 1 to be connected to a trained EAP representative who will help you find a therapist that fits your specific situation. The representative will assist you in scheduling your initial appointment or provide you with a referral code for you to schedule an appointment through LiveHealth Online.

Website: AnthemEAP.com (Enter State of Indiana to log in)
Access all of the Anthem EAP online tools and resources.

Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging



Course Summary: Conflict is inevitable—in work and in life. Managers must address performance issues, and colleagues with competing priorities must figure out how to work together. These situations call for having difficult conversations. In this course, Marlene Chism explains how to have difficult conversations, build your communication skills, and improve your relationships, teamwork, and business performance.

Time: 67 minutes

Click [here](#) to access the program

SHIELD SPOTLIGHT

INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT
AWARD



John Smith

Public Health Paladin
Indiana Department of Health



"This really means a lot to me because this recognition is from my peers, the people I work side-by-side with everyday..."



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](#).



It's a brand new year, and that means new opportunities to be well and earn rewards through the ActiveHealth program in 2021! Check out these two incentives below:

Flu Shot: \$25

Don't forget, employees and spouses who received a flu shot between Aug. 1, 2020 and Dec. 31, 2020, and are currently eligible for the ActiveHealth program, have earned another \$25 e-gift card. Visit your ActiveHealth Rewards Center to redeem your e-gift card.

Health Assessment: \$25

Log in to www.myactivehealth.com/stateofindiana and click the health assessment link. Complete by Nov. 30, 2021 to earn the \$25 e-gift card.



Mike Miller

GUESS WHO I MET ON THE ELEVATOR?



Title: Weights & Measures Program Director

Brief Job Description: Manages his division of nine employees and gives guidance to 61 county and city weights & measures officials that certify weighing and measuring devices within Indiana. He also oversees the Weights & Measures Metrology Lab, which calibrates and certifies the testing equipment used by seventy officials throughout Indiana.

Time at IDOH: 19 years

What do you like most about working at IDOH?

"I love that there are so many aspects to what we do here at Weights and Measures. We deal with everything from checking gas pumps to scales for deli items, and even timing devices like you find at laundromats and self-serve car washes."

Other information: "I love going camping in my travel trailer."

Staffing updates

Welcome to the following staff members who join the Indiana Department of Health in January:

Jodi Hoefling, public health nurse surveyor, Acute Care; Amy Hall, public health nurse surveyor, Acute Care; Tara Moore, program coordinator, Vital Records; Alexandra Reyna, public health nurse surveyor, Long Term Care; Natalie Rivich, public health administrator, Tobacco Prevention; Elizabeth Phillips, laboratory tech, IDOH Lab; Brielle Petty, violence prevention program evaluator, Women's Health; Cassandra Lim, adolescent health administrator, Maternal & Child Health; Camille Singh, public health administrator, HIV/STD; Dianna Vanwinkle, nurse surveyor, Long Term Care; Colleen Marshall, public health nurse surveyor, Acute Care; Libby Harrison, public health investigator, HIV/STD; Sydney Whiteford, epidemiologist, Trauma & Injury Prevention; Jonathan Nagy, litigation chief, Legal Affairs; and Courtney Lambert, data analyst/trainer, Data Analytics.

Adam Novotney was promoted to chief financial officer. Conor Stretch was promoted to Epidemiologist with the HIV/STD division. Noel Scott was promoted to public health administrator, HIV/STD.

Donna Sembroski transferred to IDOH from the Office of the Attorney General to be our new advisory chief in Legal Affairs.



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