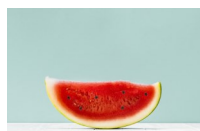




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FUN FACT

Did you know watermelon has more lycopene than any other fresh fruit or vegetable? Lycopene is an antioxidant linked to decreased risk of cancer, heart disease and age-related eye disorders.

A summer to celebrate

July 4 is the time to celebrate our nation's independence. It's a time of barbecues and fireworks that we've long taken for granted, at least before COVID-19 struck. But it feels different this year, in some ways more special, because what many of us have taken for granted was taken away last year.



**Kris Box,
MD, FACOG**

As we enter our second COVID summer, it's gratifying to see all of our hard work pay off. Our positivity rate is the lowest it's been since the start of the pandemic. The number of people admitted to the hospital has also dropped to its lowest rate since March of 2020. And we are getting back to those activities we love, without masks or social distancing in many cases.

Even though we know the pandemic is still among us, these changes feel good. They also feel strange. Many people have mentioned that it feels unnatural to get in an elevator with more than two other people and to actually see more than someone's eyes. After more than a year of being hypervigilant, this adjustment to more relaxed conditions will take some time. We are working to bring on-site mental health resources to our staff who have been impacted by the pandemic response, so watch for more details on that soon.

Many of our staff will face another adjustment as they return to their pre-pandemic

work locations next week. For some, it will be for the first time in 15 months. You'll see new faces. You may need a refresher course on filling out your travel or even on basic safety procedures, such as fire evacuations. I encourage you all to help one another. If you've forgotten a procedure or have never worked in the building because you were hired during the pandemic, ask questions. If you see an unfamiliar face, introduce yourself. Above all, show each other grace as we navigate this journey.

Our onboarding team will be returning to in-person sessions in July to help smooth the transition. We also are working to refresh as many procedures as possible so that even more tenured employees can receive a refresher.

As many of our team members return to their pre-pandemic roles, I urge you all to be vigilant against people who are looking to exploit our agency and its employees because of the heightened attention we have received during the pandemic response. I want to be clear that I will NEVER personally email an employee asking for gifts or donations for any cause. If you receive such an email that claims to be from me, as many of you did recently, immediately report it to our Office of Technology Compliance so that we can protect our staff and systems.

I wish you all a blessed Independence Day and a heartfelt "welcome back!"

Yours in health,
Kris



Communicating with Empathy

In this course, communication expert Sharon Steed explains the principles of empathetic communication and shares specific strategies to help improve your approach to difficult conversations. Get ready to learn how to converse empathetically to improve your one-on-one conversations and team interactions.

Time: 37 minutes



**Indiana
Department
of
Health**

Mission:

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

Spotlight

IDOH Laboratory helps solve the puzzle of COVID-19 variants

Until recently, the seemingly simple process of a doctor ordering a test for a specific patient, and getting a result back, was impossible in Indiana if that test was for a variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Now, thanks to the IDOH Laboratory's validation for the SARS-CoV-2 sequencing workflow, doctors *can* request and get results back on COVID variants.

The lab has been doing SARS-CoV-2 sequencing for months now, but only for variant surveillance, which gives public health officials information about specific variants spreading in a community. But validation, which is the process that demonstrates a method in the lab meets all required characteristics, such as accuracy, precision, and operator variance, is required by federal law for any lab to provide human test results to physicians. On June 7, the IDOH Laboratory completed its CLIA (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments) compliant validation of the SARS-CoV-2 sequencing workflow – mapping out of viral RNA.

"Indiana was one of the first states in the country to complete this validation," said Chris Grimes, director of Quality Assurance and Internal Training for the laboratory.

The IDOH Laboratory was well-positioned to complete the validation because it had an established validation process in place already, having used it for other previous lab tests. But Grimes credits Assistant Commissioner and Lab Director Dr. Lixia Liu for giving her team the green light to pursue validation for SARS-CoV-2 variants.

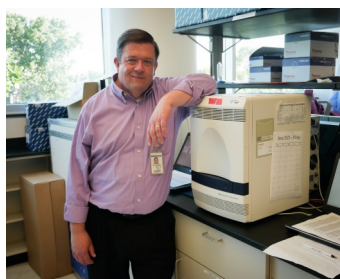
"She said, 'Let's do it!' and she supported us throughout the entire process," Grimes said.

Throughout 2020 and much of 2021, the lab has focused on diagnostic PCR testing for COVID-19, receiving up to 2,500 specimens a day. The lab's focus has recently shifted to surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 variants and is now focused on the ability to provide specific results to physicians around the state.

For the average Hoosier, what does this new certification mean? Imagine this: You have a loved one in the hospital. They test positive for



Marvin Coombs and Jaxon Pridgen use the Clear Labs sequencing platform, above. At left, Chris Grimes stands near one of the lab instruments used to perform PCR tests for COVID-19 and other illnesses.



COVID-19 but are getting sicker with standard therapies. A physician orders a test for variants to better guide treatment options. Before June 7, those test results could not be reported back to the physician.

"Knowing which variant could prompt a different response or if there is a cluster of cases, it may prompt the suggestion to keep wearing the mask a little longer," Grimes said.

The lab can now sequence up to 160 specimens per work week, an increase from 96 specimens per work week prior to validation. Approximately 66 percent of specimens that come in to the IDOH lab qualify for sequencing, and the lab sequences all of those that qualify.

This validation also improves data for hospital administrators, in that the specific variants present in their hospitals and communities will be known to them, and they can tailor their purchases of antibody for treatments accordingly.

Since June 7, the lab has already been reporting sequencing results to submitters who request those results. "It feels awesome. The work we do here is amazing," Grimes said. "I'm excited for Indiana. For doctors. And for the patients."

Anthem EAP is here to help!



Access eight free face-to-face counseling sessions. Call **(800) 223-7723** (24/7 support) and select option 1 to be connected to a trained EAP representative who will help you find a therapist who fits your specific situation.
Website: [AnthemEAP.com](https://www.AnthemEAP.com) (Enter **State of Indiana** to log in)



Health fair returns July 16-18 at Indiana Convention Center

The Indiana Black & Minority Health Fair will return to the Indiana Convention Center next month after a one-year hiatus due to the pandemic!

This year's health fair will be held in Halls I, J and K and will feature more than \$2,500 in free health screenings, as well as health education information, guest speakers, cooking demonstrations, entertainment, healthy activities and more. Available screenings include those for cholesterol, HIV testing, dental and vision issues, clinical breast exams, mental health awareness, and foot and ankle health. The health fair also will provide adolescent vaccines for children preparing to head back to school and free COVID-19 vaccines for individuals age 12 and older.

The opening ceremony will take place at 9 a.m. on July 16. Hours will be from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. July 16 and 17 and from noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday, July 18. Free transportation is available for seniors by calling FSSA's Division of Aging at 888-673-0002 by July 2.

This year's health fair is held in partnership with Indiana Black Expo but will look different from past events that were closely tied to Summer Celebration, so it's important that everyone share the word about the health fair. For many Hoosiers, the health fair has traditionally been their single point of health screenings during the year, and we don't want anyone to miss an opportunity to improve their health and well-being.

We are grateful to our many sponsors who make the health fair possible. The event also would not be possible without the support of many volunteers. Our agency volunteers this year are primarily being drawn from areas that are participating in the health fair. But if you know someone outside the agency who might be interested in volunteering to work at the health fair, click [here](#) for more information.



State Health Commissioner Kris Box addresses troops at the Roosevelt High School mass vaccination clinic during a decommissioning ceremony on May 26, 2021.

Gary mass vaccination site officially decommissioned

A nearly eight-week partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to bring vaccinations to residents in Lake County and northern Indiana successfully concluded May 29 with nearly 64,000 individuals protected against COVID-19.

IDOH partnered with FEMA to host a mass vaccination clinic at the former Roosevelt Park in Gary from April 7 to May 29, as well as mobile clinics across the northern part of the state. Nearly 48,000 individuals received their vaccinations at the Gary site, and another 16,000 were vaccinated at 16 FEMA-supported mobile clinics in the same timeframe.

During a formal decommissioning ceremony at the Roosevelt site, Dr. Kris Box and other IDOH leaders thanked the troops who worked the clinic and the partners who supported the efforts, including the City of Gary, the Gary Community School Corp., Methodist Hospitals, the Gary Public Transportation Corp., FSSA, Indiana Department of Homeland Security, Indiana 211, Luna Language Services and Hamilton Exhibits.

"We are pleased by the impact these clinics had and grateful that thousands of Hoosiers were able to receive this life-saving vaccine as a result of this effort," Dr. Box said.

Although our mass vaccination efforts in Gary and at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway have ended, the IDOH team continues to work to get vaccine where it is needed most. Mobile clinics will be hitting the road weekly this summer to visit county fairs, festivals and venues where people are likely to gather. Please help spread the word about these clinics, because every shot given puts us one step closer to ending the pandemic.

Public health journey has roots in Russia for new lab leader

The past 15 months tackling COVID-19 have transformed public health. The Indiana Department of Health's newest division director learned that teamwork and dedication are the most important qualities in the time of crisis, along with other lessons.

"Public awareness of communicable diseases has increased significantly," Sergey Smulevitch said. "That will influence my work in the future."

Smulevitch has joined IDOH as a division director in the IDOH Laboratory, overseeing virology and serology. He is responsible for operations, which includes working with laboratory supervisors and communicating with vendors, the CDC and partner laboratories. In addition, he writes standard operating procedures, manages installation of equipment, and works on the development and validation of new tests.

"Whenever possible, I try to streamline the work of my division to improve efficiency and quality," he said.

Smulevitch was born in Moscow, Russia, and earned his Ph.D. in chemistry from Moscow State University. Living in the U.S. since 1993 and in Indiana since 2008, his previous work includes roles as a postdoctoral scientist in academia, a research fellow at the National Institutes of Health and in private industry.

His experience includes publishing research manuscripts, authoring patents, developing diagnostic assays and supporting diagnostic platforms. He said his interest has always been in emerging technologies and their integration into practice, both in research and diagnostics, and that public health is one of the most impactful places for them.

"The IDOH Laboratory is where rapid deployment of technologies, like Next Generation Sequencing, brings tangible results for Hoosiers," he said.

Smulevitch wants his colleagues to know that they can ask him anything related to our common goals at the lab, and he will try his best to provide an answer. Outside of work, Smulevitch enjoys bicycling, walking his dogs and listening to classical music. He is also a competitive shooter.



Sergey Smulevitch



Members of the IDOH team celebrate the opening of the Connections Café, the new home to Fayette County's syringe services program, on June 21.



Returning to work: Things to know

As our remaining team members prepare to return to their pre-pandemic work locations July 6, we want to make sure you have the information you need to make the return as easy as possible.

Much of our operation is back to its pre-pandemic status. Shuttle capacity is back to normal capacity, as are elevators. Our conference rooms also have had chairs added back. But none of this means that we can't continue to take steps to protect ourselves and others.

If you are not yet fully vaccinated, please plan to wear a mask in the building when you are around others and can't socially distance. Anyone who feels more comfortable can continue to wear a mask.

Please also remember that the agency's [dress code](#) is in force. This means that business casual attire is expected Monday through Thursday, unless you are participating in the Thursday SECC "jeans day" fundraiser. If so, please make sure your designated donation collector receives your contribution in a timely manner.

Other updates include our new URL, <https://www.in.gov/health/>, or [health.in.gov](https://www.in.gov/health/). Both redirect to our old [isdh.in.gov](https://www.in.gov/health/) website.

Our content management system also has changed, from RedDot to Squiz Matrix. Please make sure that appropriate staff have been trained in its use.

Finally, watch for some familiar faces to occupy 2 North in the coming weeks. Food Protection and Environmental Public Health will be moving from the Government Center and occupying space on floors 2 and 3 in late July.

Deadlines loom for insurance discounts

The last day to start your health coaching program to qualify for your 2022 Premium Discount is July 1. Call ActiveHealth at 855-202-4219 to get started. Completing four in-person or telephonic health coaching sessions by Sept. 30, 2021 is one way to earn a Premium Discount for 2022.

You also can receive your insurance discount by reaching Level 5 in ActiveHealth's online health education. Visit

www.myactivehealth.com/stateofindiana to get started today. The deadline to begin is Aug. 27.

Your chosen activity must be completed by Sept. 30 to qualify for the 2022 health premium discount. Track your progress toward completing an activity in your Rewards Center on the ActiveHealth portal, www.myactivehealth.com/stateofindiana

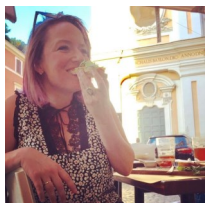


Reminder of PeopleSoft changes

The State of Indiana is giving its HR and Payroll system (PeopleSoft) a make-over, and it's happening in just a few short months.

Major changes are coming to how we request the use of accrued leave and how we submit our time. Get in the habit now of submitting and approving time before the deadline. Delays to this process could mean delays to your paycheck. Other changes include easy-to-use self-service features for forms, W2 delivery, benefits updates and more.

Mandatory training is being developed by the project team, which is led by the Office of the Auditor of State. Shane Hatchett (Agency Sponsor), Adam Novotney and Heather Whitaker will be leading the charge here to help guide you through this change. Together we can ensure a smooth transition toward a much more functional and modern method for your HR and Payroll-related transactions that will provide for greater efficiency and security. For more information, you can find resources on the statewide project portal by clicking [here](#). Curious but strapped for time? Click [here](#) to watch a two-minute introductory video.



Kristin Kearns

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



Title: Procurement and RFC manager

Brief Job Description: I work with our various programs to encumber funds through our RFC (Request for Contract) process, to make sure that we follow proper procurement guidelines and all things Knowledge Services (read: I help you spend your money!)

Time at IDOH: 10 years; 19 years total with the state

What do you like most about working at IDOH? "I enjoy working in public health and being a public servant. I love that my position allows me to work and interact with all the programs, and so many people within our agency. We have such a friendly work environment, and it is truly rewarding to see all our work come to fruition. Also, working downtown, right on the circle, is NOT a terrible thing

Other information: "I love to travel, see live music, and spend time with my incredible family (and my 21-year-old cat, who I am certain will outlive me).

Staffing updates

Please welcome the following new hires:

Ghislaire Hernandez, IDOH Laboratories; Jassdeep Nijjar, Maternal & Child Health; Grace Bassett, Environmental Public Health; Marianela Fuentes, HIV/STD; Kayla Bates, HIV/STD; Kayla Bates, administrative assistance, HIV/STD; Amy Caudill, public health nurse surveyor, Long-Term Care; Steven VanderPlaats, Emergency Preparedness; Kaylyn Martin, Emergency Preparedness; Jessica Pinyerd, nurse consultant, Children's Special Health Care Services; Ayomide Benson, HIV/STD; Shelby Nierman, Data Analytics; Caitlin Mark, Epidemiology Resource Center; Steven Minnett, public health nurse surveyor, Long-Term Care; Casey Sampson, public health nurse surveyor, Long-Term Care.; Christopher Monjeau, Emergency Preparedness; Brent Brown, Office of Public Affairs; and Cameron Bumbleburg, water microbiology intern.

Please also congratulate the following on their promotions:

Kristi Linson, director, Children's Special Health Care Services; Alan Goff, manager, Weights & Measures; Taj Mohammad, chemist supervisor 3, Laboratories; Daniel Sterling, program director, HIV/STD; Apostolos Diogias, chemist 2, Laboratories.



indianamuseum.org

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

Tobacco Quitline celebrates 15 years of helping Hoosiers

Professional help is often the key to overcoming a tobacco addiction. In a state that has a high rate of smoking prevalence, Indiana is fortunate that help is just a phone call away.

The Indiana Tobacco Quitline (1-800-QUIT-NOW) is celebrating its 15th anniversary. Since launching in March 2006 with funding from the 1998 [Master Settlement Agreement](#), the Quitline has been integral to helping Hoosiers lead their healthiest lives.

The Quitline is managed by the Indiana Tobacco Prevention and Cessation (TPC) division. When Hoosiers dial 1-800-QUIT-NOW, they are connected to help within 48 hours.

"The Quitline is the largest free tobacco cessation resource available to all Hoosiers," said Christine Coverstone, communications coordinator for TPC.

The Quitline is a part of [Quit Now Indiana](#), a comprehensive toolbox for Hoosiers trying to quit not just smoking, but any form of tobacco and nicotine use, including e-cigarettes. The website draws you in with a sharp design and easy navigation, where users find online tools, videos, and the opportunity to interact with other Hoosiers attempting to quit.

For its 15th anniversary, the Quitline is offering three new services:

- Four weeks of free nicotine patches and gum to anyone who enrolls
- Text2Start, which allows participants to enroll in Quitline services through text message
- Individual services, which let participants customize their quit attempt and include personal coaching



Natalie Rivich

"We offer a variety of supports," said Natalie Rivich, the Quitline manager. "Once enrolled in the services, the participant receives a specific number of personal coaching sessions with a trained quit coach, depending on their selected program. They can call an unlimited number of times for support outside of those sessions too."

Callers also can get a therapy that combines behavioral health services.

"They self-report those behavioral health issues," Rivich said. "We want to eliminate barriers to a quit attempt."

The Quitline's success is determined by the quit rate of its users.

To date, 43 percent have remained tobacco-free after going through the program, and 96 percent of users would recommend the program to another tobacco user. Those statistics are reflected in the decline in Indiana's smoking rate, which has fallen to 19.2 percent from 25.9 percent in 2011.

Coverstone says research shows that only 4 percent to 7 percent of users successfully quit on their own. "It takes users seven attempts or more to quit," she said. "But every try counts. And the Quitline is here to support people with each attempt."

If tobacco use—including e-cigarettes—is something you or a loved one is struggling with, reach out. "The Quitline is one of the best kept secrets in Indiana," Rivich said.



My Healthy Baby wins Silver in Telly Awards

Indiana's OB navigator program, My Healthy Baby, launched in 22 counties in 2020 and will launch in 25 more this year, beginning in July. The program, which is critical to our efforts to reduce infant and maternal mortality, aims to connect pregnant women who receive Medicaid benefits with home visiting services that will help ensure that they have the tools to have a healthy pregnancy and that their baby thrives.

Williams Randall Advertising, which has led the marketing efforts for My Healthy Baby, entered the online commercials for the program in The Telly Awards, a national advertising show and competition. We were notified recently that the commercials received a silver award in the not-for-profit category for its online videos. You can see examples of the videos in English and Spanish [here](#) and [here](#).

The Telly Awards was founded in 1979 to honor excellence in local, regional and cable television commercials, with non-broadcast video and television programming added soon after. The competition receives more than 12,000 entries from all 50 states and five continents, so this recognition puts IDOH and Williams Randall Advertising at the top of the class. Congratulations to all who were involved with the development of the commercials.

A list of all of The Telly Awards winners can be found [here](#). To learn more about My Healthy Baby, visit <https://www.in.gov/myhealthybaby>.



Exciting data changes coming

The Indiana Department of Health is partnering with Resultant to embark on a digital transformation project that takes a holistic view at the data we have and how we maximize its use and the technology at our disposal. An agency-wide live Teams meeting is planned for 9 a.m. Wednesday to discuss the project and how it will benefit the agency and its programs. An invitation has been sent, so please be sure to tune in Wednesday morning to learn more!