



Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission

Serving the towns of Bound Brook, Green Brook, Middlesex, South Bound Brook, Warren and Watchung

Special Issue

2009 Influenza A - H1N1 Virus Takes Us by Surprise

For the past 6+ years, all 'public health eyes' have been watching the spread of 'Avian Flu,' the infection caused by the **H5N1** influenza virus, which thus far has primarily infected poultry. That particular virus has arisen in multiple countries around the globe, with the epicenter being Indonesia and other Asian countries (**see insert article on Pandemic Flu.**) Public health officials continue to monitor that virus, concerned that they may see it make that 'critical leap' of being transmissible from human-to-human. Instead, most current cases have occurred as a result of contact with infected chickens and other fowl.



Not so for the **2009 Influenza A - H1N1** outbreak ('Swine Flu'). This virus seems to have 'appeared out of nowhere,' infecting individuals NOT by contact with infected animals but rather by contact with infected individuals. Why has there been such concern about this particular virus? Because it meets three key criteria that would suggest it may cause a global pandemic. Those criteria are: 1) It is a novel virus, against which the population has no immunity; 2) It can cause serious human disease; and 3) It can be spread person-to-person. The **Influenza A - H1N1** virus meets all three conditions.

The **2009 Influenza A - H1N1** outbreak is an evolving situation, but here's what we know to date. Though the identified case count in U.S. has already numbered into the thousands, and the virus has spread to over 20 countries, the outbreak is considered to be relatively mild. This is often noted in comparison to the effects of 'seasonal' flu, which is recognized to result in about 36,000 deaths in the U.S. alone each year. *However, whether the severity of H1N1 increases, or some as-of-yet-unknown virus emerges, we must all be attentive, informed and prepared. The occurrence of H1N1 has clearly demonstrated that novel strains of influenza can and do arise quickly, and rapidly affecting many countries around globe. Fortunately, preparing for and preventing disease is something we can all accomplish.*

To start, this outbreak serves as an important reminder to apply everyday prevention measures... everyday. These include:

- **Washing Your Hands Often** -- especially before eating, to help protect you from germs
- **Avoiding Close Contact** with people who are sick. If providing care, remember to wash your frequently.
- **Staying Home If Your Sick**, to avoid spreading germs to others.
- **Covering Your Nose And Mouth** when you sneeze or cough
- **Avoiding Touching Your Eyes, Nose And Mouth** to reduce your chance of infection

While the current H1N1 virus seems to be mild in nature, this is not the time to breathe a sigh of relief. Instead, it is time to carefully consider your family's level of preparedness. And then, take the steps needed to improve upon it. Please see the insert for previously-distributed information on how to help your family -- and your community -- become better prepared.

See
Special
Insert
on emergency
preparedness
and pandemic
influenza

Originally developed in
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Free Child Health Services for Those in Need

Particularly during these difficult economic times, MBRHC reminds residents that, together with its member municipalities, Bound Brook, Green Brook, Middlesex, South Bound Brook, Warren, and Watchung, it offers free monthly child health services to children in need who reside in those towns.



Through a contract with the Community Visiting Nurses Association (VNA), this monthly 'child health conference' offers the following services:

- Childhood immunizations
- Infant and Preschool-age physicals by a licensed physician
- Counseling and education by registered nurses
- Diet counseling
- Lead testing
- Guidance and education on child development

These services are available to those who have no health insurance or who may be experiencing financial constraints that stop them from receiving preventive health services for their children.

Do not let lack of money stop you from providing your children needed health services. Please call the VNA at 908-725-9355 for an appointment or for more information. Together we can keep our children healthy.

Public Health Matters Completes its First Year...and Moves Into New Technology!

Public Health Matters, MBRHC's monthly cable access program has completed its first year of programming, providing residents with timely, candid information about a variety of public health issues. The program reaches residents in 11 towns in Somerset and Middlesex counties.

Two guests are interviewed each month, each providing information specific to their area of expertise. Since the last issue of this newsletter, programs regarding prostate cancer and screening information, seasonal influenza prevention, women's cervical health and pandemic influenza (a special one-hour program) have all been aired.

With the assistance of our colleagues at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of NJ – School of Public Health, most of our programs are now viewable directly from the MBRHC website! Just click on "Public Health Matters" to see the information about each show, and a link to "You Tube" where the shows can be watched at any time. In addition, the School of Public Health, Office of Public Health Practice will be supporting five episodes of **Public Health Matters** in 2009.

Please give us your feedback! Visit our website and click on "We Want Your Feedback!" You will be directed to an online survey where you can tell us your thoughts about the show.

A special program on pandemic influenza was first aired in March 2009. Little did we know that April would end with an increased global pandemic alert level, as a result of the current *Influenza A - H1N1* virus. This program has been aired frequently in May, on both Piscataway Community TV and Warren Media.



Guest Randi Proctor and Mae Belin of Women's Health and Counseling Center are interviewed for Cervical Health Awareness Month

Now Available:

Our special program 'Preparing Today for Emergencies Tomorrow' is now available in Spanish on DVD. If you would like to request a copy for your group or organization just call our office at (732)356-8090, and provide your name and address, or just come by to pick one up.



MBRHC Steps Up Quality Improvement Efforts

In recent years, health departments nationwide have taken steps to design and implement quality improvement efforts within their agencies, working to assure delivery of the best public health services possible to their communities.

This past fall, Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission stepped up to the plate by exploring various customer satisfaction processes to determine how to best seek feedback on the services being provided. Recognizing that evaluating services is a critical first step in quality improvement, staff worked together to develop various feedback surveys. "Our goal", according to Kevin Sumner, Health Officer, "is to ensure that the Commission is best meeting the needs of the communities we serve. The only way to find that out is to ask service recipients directly."

The first group to receive these surveys were attendees at our flu and rabies clinics, held in November and December. With assistance from Board of Health Volunteers, attendees were asked a handful of questions about their experiences at the clinic. Based on this feedback, MBRHC staff can modify the way in which services are delivered, if indicated. For all survey results, see our website, and click on "We Want Your Feedback!"

Successful implementation of quality improvement activities not only lead to improved customer satisfaction, but also better health outcomes for the community.

Use of Satisfaction Surveys Expanded

Like all health departments, MBRHC inspects many different types of businesses, including restaurants, day care centers, public pools, tattoo parlors, animal kennels and others. While enforcement of health codes is certainly part of an inspector's role, another key objective is to educate staff of regulated businesses on safe and sanitary procedures. With the assistance of MPH student intern Ammy Chen, 'post-inspection surveys' have now been developed to assess whether or not we are meeting our objectives and providing the best services possible. Beginning in March, one week after an establishment is inspected, it will receive the post-inspection survey. The survey can be completed on paper or online and is completely anonymous; it will not affect the outcome of future inspections. Efforts are also underway to have surveys translated into Spanish and Chinese.

In addition, individuals who visit the Registrar's Office for marriage applications or certified copies of birth and death certificates will be given a similar customer satisfaction survey.

We are very excited about the launch of this customer satisfaction process and look forward to receiving any and all feedback, about any of the services we provide. The results of these surveys will be reviewed and analyzed routinely, to help us identify ways to improve our services. Watch for survey results to be posted on our website!



Annual Well-Water Testing: Money Well Spent

Each year, residential wells are tested and found contaminated with various potential health hazards. In response to this, many municipalities and the State require testing of wells prior to the sale of a property and for rental properties. **However, there is no law requiring the private homeowner to test their well on a regular basis** and consequently many individuals are likely to be unknowingly exposed to potentially harmful materials.

The Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission urges all property owners whose properties are served by a private well to test the well on an annual basis. We

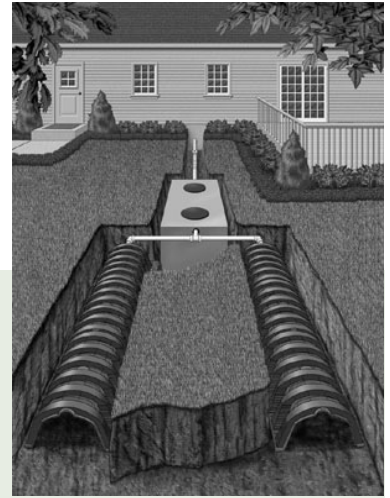
suggest testing for the compounds identified in the State's **Private Well Testing Act**, but at a minimum wells should be tested for chemical and bacterial contamination.

Well testing must be conducted by a private state-certified laboratory. A list of these laboratories can be found at: http://www.state.nj.us/dep/pwta/pwta_lablist.htm or you may contact MBRHC at 732-356-8090 for information on local labs.

Although the price of a well test may be more than you would like to spend, we believe it is money well spent, to help ensure the safety of your family.

Proper Maintenance of Septic System Key to Its Longevity

Does your home have a septic system? Proper maintenance of a Subsurface Disposal System (septic system) not only saves you from costly repairs, but also prevents a potential health hazard for both you and your neighbors. Homeowners are reminded of these important care points:



DO:

- **Pump your septic system frequently.** Most experts recommend that you pump your septic tank every 3 years (more often if you have a garbage disposal system). While having your septic tank pumped it is a good idea to have the septic contractor check the inside of the tank to make sure that the baffles are intact. Doing these things should help to prevent solids from entering the distribution field which is the primary cause for most malfunctions.
- **Conserve water.** Decreasing the hydraulic load on a septic system, would also help to extend the life of your septic system. You can accomplish this by repairing plumbing fixtures to prevent running toilet fixtures or leaks and replacing old plumbing fixtures with more efficient ones.
- **Inspect your septic field area.** You may be able to extend the life of your septic system by simply making sure that there are no trees planted near you sub-surface disposal system. Roots from trees can wreak havoc on your disposal system. You also want to check to see if rain water is running over your septic field. You can reduce the hydraulic load impacting your system by simply redirecting your roof drains and other sources of rainwater runoff away from your distribution field.

DO NOT:

- **Run heavy equipment over your distribution field.** The laterals in a disposal field are not designed to support the weight of most vehicles.
- **Place recreational equipment on your distribution field.** Your septic disposal system was not designed to support the weight of items like swing sets or storage sheds. Also avoid paving over your disposal field. This will reduce the ability of some effluent to evaporate.
- **Use biological additives.** The bacteria in your septic tank is already capable of handling the waste water.
- **Use chemical additives.** Especially avoid the use of chemical additives which contains banned toxic substances. Halogenated Hydrocarbons like Tetrachloroethylene (PCE) and Aromatic Hydrocarbons like Benzene, or Toluene. These additives are not particularly helpful in extending the life of the system and will eventually contaminate nearby wells. Also avoid flushing paint, paint thinners and pesticides down your toilet. Instead, dispose of these chemicals during your County Household Hazardous Waste Day. Visit www.njhazwaste.com to see schedule for all NJ counties.

For more information on caring for your septic system, visit our website and click on 'Environmental Health.'



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.