

HEALTH HAPPENINGS

A quarterly newsletter brought to you by Nashoba Associated Boards of Health

Serving the public health needs of Ashburnham, Ashby, Ayer, Berlin, Bolton, Boxborough, Devens, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Littleton, Lunenburg, Pepperell, Shirley, Stow, Townsend, and the community of Devens

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Issue: Spring (May) 2023

Spring 2023

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Above Photo: Spring Tulips, Photographed by Bridgette Braley, RS– Nashoba Assoc. Boards of Health Sanitarian & Food Inspector

It's Spring once again in the Nashoba Valley Region! The month of May is often one of our busiest times as an agency, and this year is no exception. With the "official" end of the COVID-19 public health emergency, we are returning to "business as usual," and it feels GREAT! We hope you've been able to return to "business as usual" too, whatever that may mean for you.

May marks several awareness and recognition months, including Mental Health Awareness, Stroke Awareness, and National Nurse's Month. We have teamed up with our community to educate our residents about mental health and stroke during the weeks of May and June. We also have been infusing more mental health-related programming into our public health outreach activities throughout the region. We are hearing in our communities and beyond that mental health challenges are more widespread than ever. Please reach out to us if there is a specific public health-related topic that you think would be valuable for your town, and we'll see how we can help meet the need.

-Jenna Montgomery, LICSW

Communications Specialist @ Nashoba Associated Boards of Health

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Agency Updates- Environmental Division:

The Nashoba Associated Boards of Health Environmental Division continues to work directly with the local elected Boards of Health and residents in our towns, enforcing State Sanitary and Environmental Codes, Massachusetts General Laws, and local regulations. As summer approaches, the Health Agents from Nashoba's Environmental Division are working with your local Boards of Health to permit and provide guidance and inspections for public and semi-public bathing beaches and swimming pools, recreational camps for children, and developed family-type camp grounds which may operate in your communities.



Environmental Corner: Drought Thoughts

Clean water is an invaluable resource and humans rely on clean water for many uses! We often don't think about this resource until it is no longer available, or becomes compromised. *Potable water*, or water safe for human consumption, is our source for drinking water and other domestic uses.



During the summer of 2022 the State experienced lower than normal precipitation which resulted in much of the State being considered in significant to critical drought.

The water we use is obtained from reservoirs, rivers, gravel well fields and bedrock wells and all of these sources are recharged by precipitation- some more directly than others (surface water more immediately, the groundwater is recharged as precipitation makes its way in to the ground, and some groundwater does enter the bedrock.) When precipitation is below normal, the effect on the surface waters is more obvious as we can see the lower water levels in our surface bodies of water and wetlands. Water utilities who use well fields and bedrock wells have the ability to monitor the water levels in their wells to determine if those supplies are impacted. They can ask users to make changes in their water use or issue restrictions to encourage conservation. Those individuals served by their own private well cannot easily determine if the well capacity is being impacted by extended periods of below normal precipitation. They might not know they are having a problem until their well is dry (if this happens, it is the private well owners who is responsible for addressing the loss of water).

The need for clean water is constant and all water users can take steps to ensure adequate supplies are available through smart water use, water saving tips, and conservation methods. These steps may also reduce the cost of providing water to your home or business!

The resources listed below provide water users with information on how to ensure adequate water resources are available, on the State's approach and reporting on drought, and with useful information for private well owners.

<https://www.mass.gov/private-wells>

<https://www.mass.gov/conservemawater>

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/drought-management-in-massachusetts>



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Agency Updates– Public Health Nursing Division:



Our public health nurses Tamara Bedard, RN, Alicia Lepardo, RN, and Maureen Scott, LPN, have been hard at work keeping our communities healthy. They have continued to conduct communicable disease case investigation and follow up (including but not limited to tick-borne illnesses, food-borne illnesses, and tuberculosis), home visits, collaboration with community colleagues, monthly well adult clinics in all of our communities, educational programming such as Stroke Awareness+ Brain Health & Mindfulness Meditation, and appearing at local events to educate the community about health, factors that influence it, and how to improve it. See May's Well Adult Clinic calendar on page 10, and check our website <https://www.nashoba.org/calendar> for the latest schedule! May is also National Nurse's Month– thank a nurse today for making a difference, every day!

Did you know you that if you live in a town in Nashoba's region, you can call to consult with our Public Health nurses regarding health-related concerns and resources during our business hours? Or, that if you reside in our region and you test positive for a communicable disease that's reportable under Massachusetts State law, one of our nurses may call you to conduct a case investigation? Visit the Public Health Nursing page on our website <https://www.nashoba.org/public-health> to learn more about all of the services offered.

COVID-19: Pandemic to Endemic



If we're being honest with ourselves, the past few years have been extremely difficult. Our world was turned completely upside-down by a nasty, spiky little germ. We witnessed some of the brightest and darkest parts of humanity in the course of it all. And now, here we are– on the other side of a global pandemic, FINALLY. The COVID-19 Public Health emergency officially came to an end on May 11th, 2023. So, what does this mean, exactly?

COVID-19 is not going away; it's here to stay. The end of the public health emergency was officially declared because we now have the tools we need to fight this germ effectively, meaning COVID-19 is now *endemic* rather than *pandemic*. *Endemic* means more common and less severe. We'll be approaching it more like influenza– better known as the flu. At one time the flu was a pandemic, too– before we learned how to fight it effectively!



At this point, we all know how to protect ourselves from COVID-19 based on our own personal risk profiles. That said, below is a quick refresher on several steps you can take to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and keep your community healthy!

- Stay up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccines: mass.gov/covidvaccine
- Test if you have symptoms: mass.gov/GetTested
- Get treatment if needed: mass.gov/CovidTreatments
- Stay home when sick: mass.gov/isol8
- Mask up if you need to: mass.gov/MaskUpMA
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer: www.mass.gov/handwashing



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Agency Updates– Nashoba Nursing Service & Hospice (NNS&H):



Nashoba's **Home Health** division continues to offer high quality in-home care to help patients heal and regain their independence. We are currently seeking candidates to fill the roles of Homecare RN Case Manager and Per-diem Certified Nurse's Assistant/Home Health Aide; more information and application available at <https://www.nashoba.org/careers>. Thanks to generous donations from the Friends of Nashoba Nursing Service & Hospice non-profit, the Home Health division has been able to obtain new occupational therapy equipment for patients.

Nashoba's **Hospice** division continues to provide comprehensive, compassionate care for people with a life-limiting illness as well as their family and caregivers. We are proud members of the Pet Peace of Mind Program, which offers resources and supports that enable people to keep their pets at home with them during their end-of-life journey, and assists with re-homing a pet after a patient passes away. Our Hospice division offers regular grief support groups and grief socials for our patients and the community– more information on page 10.

Seasonal Allergies

After the cold, dark winter, we are more than ready for the warm fresh air, sunshine and new life spring brings. However, this time of year can present real challenges for those suffering with seasonal allergies. "Seasonal allergies, like other types of allergies, develop when the body's immune system overreacts to something in the environment, usually during spring, summer or fall when certain plants pollinate" (Amer. College of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology). If you or your family members suffer from environmental allergies, here are some tips to help decrease allergy symptoms:

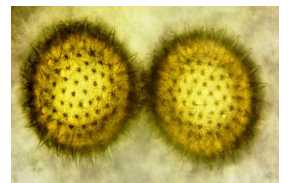


Photo Caption: "The Pollening"- The above photo of a pollen cloud over Ayer was captured on May 22nd, 2022 by local resident Lori Daniells from Prospect Hill in Harvard. Thank you, Lori, for allowing us to share your incredible photo!

- Keep windows closed inside your home and car
- Keep pets out of the bedroom
- Shower and wash your hair before going to bed
- Change your clothes soon after coming inside
- Wash bedding in hot water
- Use dust mite covers on all bedding
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water
- Avoid touching your eyes
- Monitor daily pollen counts and avoid going outdoors during high pollen times
- Always consult your health care provider before taking medications; if you take over the counter allergy medication such as Claritin or Zyrtec, take the medication daily and follow directions carefully to be effective against allergies.
- Speak with your health care provider if symptoms persist.

Sources:

<https://acaai.org/allergies/seasonal-allergies>
<https://www.aaafa.org/rhinitis-nasal-allergy-hayfever/>



WOAH! This is what pollen looks like under a microscope.

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Community Partnership:



We continue to engage with our communities to both lead and support efforts to keep our residents healthy! Since our last newsletter, we have participated in a number of events throughout the region- read on for the highlights.

February 2023: Nurse Maureen presented at Stone Soup Kitchen in Ayer on Heart Health in recognition of American Heart Month. We also kicked off our annual regional rabies clinics for pets, which ran through early April. A BIG thank you to our participating veterinarians in the region for helping us to provide this important service! We consulted with the Stow Board of Health on communications they are developing for new residents, and attended Boxborough's Wellbeing Committee meeting.

March 2023: We recorded remarks that aired at the North Central Massachusetts Legislative breakfast hosted by the Health Equity Partnership of North Central MA (CHNA-9) and the Joint Coalition on Health (JCOH), and participated in CHNA-9's Community Health Improvement Planning session in Townsend. We provided a letter of support for the Ashburnham Library in their pursuit of a food literacy grant. We attended the Harvard Board of Health's PFAS Information Forum to learn from a knowledgeable panel of experts alongside our community. You can access slides, documents and the event recording here: <https://www.harvard-ma.gov/board-health/pages/resources-regarding-pfas>.

April 2023: Public Health Educator Jenna recording a Spring Health update with Lunenburg media, which you can watch here: <https://vimeo.com/817133657/c87be39f8a>. Jenna and Tamara tabled at the Lancaster Employee Benefits Fair, and Jenna tabled with Leanne, our Nurse Educator with NNS&H, at Townsend's Earth Day event with information about the agency and tick-borne illness.

May 2023: Tamara offered blood pressure screenings at Stow's employee health fair, and Maureen and Leanne tabled at the annual Nashoba Children's Day Fair in Bolton. Maureen and Alicia offered a mindfulness meditation at the Ayer Senior Center. We also tabled at the Ayer Employee Benefits Fair, and Tamara delivered a Stroke Awareness talk in Lancaster.

Upcoming Events:

Bolton Senior Health Fair- we will be tabling at this event on May 17th

Stroke Awareness Activities- We have partnered with Nashoba Valley Medical Center (NVMC) to engage in Stroke Awareness Activities throughout the region. This includes distributing materials, screening residents for stroke risk factors, and educating our community. Upcoming Stroke Awareness Talks with your local Public Health Nurse will be at the Lancaster Community Center on May 16th, Stone Soup Kitchen in Ayer on May 23rd and the Ashburnham Stevens Memorial Library on June 8th.

Mental Health Awareness- We have also partnered with NVMC to provide mental health-related learning opportunities for town personnel throughout our region. On May 25th we are hosting a mental health learning collaborative, and on June 1st we are hosting a mental health first aid training.

Monthly Well Adult Clinics- Well Adult Clinics are held monthly throughout Nashoba's service region. Well Adult Clinics are an opportunity for adult residents to have a basic health screening and talk with their town nurse! See May's schedule on page 10.

For an up-to-date list of where we've been and will be in the region, please visit our News & Events page on the web at www.nashoba.org/news-events. You can also view archived versions of our newsletter while you're there!



Brain Health & Stroke Prevention At Stone Soup Kitchen

How does the brain work?
How can you keep your brain healthy?
Why is it important to act FAST if you experience signs of a stroke?

-May 23rd, 2023 at 6 PM-

-Stone Soup Kitchen- 41 Littleton Rd, Ayer, MA-
May is Stroke Awareness Month! Learn about the brain, stroke symptoms, risk factors and prevention with your local Public Health Nurse!

Photos top to bottom: Leanne and Jenna at Townsend's Earth Day event., a flyer for our upcoming Brain Health & Stroke Prevention talk at Stone Soup Kitchen

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May has been observed as Mental Health Awareness Month since 1949. This year (2023), the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is celebrating with the *More Than Enough* campaign.

"It's an opportunity for all of us to come together and remember the inherent value we each hold — no matter our diagnosis, appearance, socioeconomic status, background or ability. We want every person out there to know that if all you did was wake up today, that's *more than enough*. No matter what, you are inherently worthy of *more than enough* life, love and healing. Showing up, just as you are, for yourself and the people around you is *more than enough*" (NAMI, 2023).

24/7 SUPPORT
www.masshelpline.com



VISIT THE WEBSITE TO CHAT

**Going through a tough time?
Help is here.**

Are you or someone you care about struggling with mental health or substance use? In crisis, or working hard to prevent one? It can be difficult to know where to turn for help.

The Massachusetts Behavioral Health Help Line (BHHL) is here to connect you directly to clinical help, when and where you need it. Even if you're not sure what kind of help or treatment you may need, we can help guide you. We are here for you 24/7, including on holidays.

- ♦ It's free, confidential, and no health insurance is required.
- ♦ Real-time interpretation in 200+ languages.
- ♦ Deaf or hard of hearing? Contact MassRelay at 711, or use your video relay or caption provider of choice.

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MENTAL HEALTH & Access to Care in RURAL AMERICA

People from all communities are affected by mental illness, but rural Americans often experience unique barriers to managing their mental health.



AMONG U.S. ADULTS IN NONMETROPOLITAN AREAS, 2020:

21%

experienced mental illness

6%

experienced serious mental illness

13%

experienced a substance use disorder

5%

had serious thoughts of suicide

ACCESS TO TREATMENT IS SEVERELY LIMITED

Among U.S. adults in nonmetropolitan areas, 2020:



with a mental illness received treatment



with a serious mental illness received treatment

Compared to suburban and urban residents, rural Americans:



must travel **2x** as far to their nearest hospital



are **2x** as likely to lack broadband internet, limiting access to telehealth

25+ MILLION

rural Americans live in Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas, where there are too few providers to meet demand

SOME POPULATIONS FACE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

53% of rural adults say the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their mental health:



of farmers and farmworkers



of younger adults aged 18-34

Many rural states have a postpartum depression rate higher than the national average of 13%:



Rural youth are at an increased risk of suicide, but highly rural areas have fewer youth suicide prevention services

Data from CDC, NIMH and other select sources. Find citations for this resource at nami.org/mhstats

NAMI HelpLine
800-950-NAMI (6264)

f NAMI

Twitter NAMICommunicate

Instagram NAMICommunicate

www.nami.org

nami
National Alliance on Mental Illness

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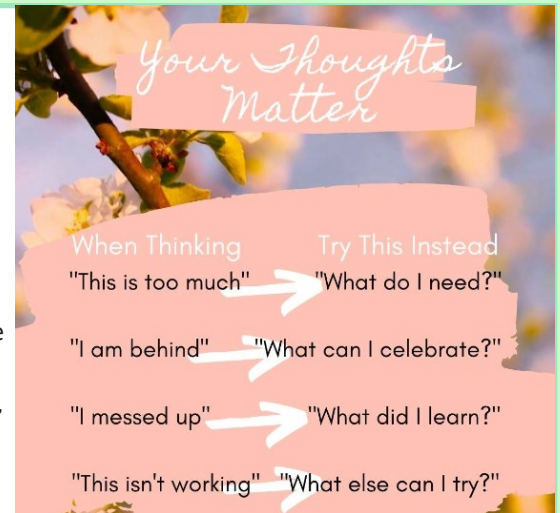
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Your Thoughts Matter!

As human beings, we tend to feel comfortable with patterns and predictability. Sometimes this works against us— especially when it comes to our thoughts! It's easy to fall into patterns of negative thinking, and these patterns can influence our mood and actions. Sometimes it can become a spiral of negatives, and this is never a healthy place to be!

The first step is to notice your negative thoughts; notice when you're having thoughts that don't serve you. Even if you aren't yet working to change them, just becoming aware of these thoughts is a very important start. Once you are *aware* of them, you can begin to *challenge* them with an approach of non-judgmental curiosity. Our goal is not POSITIVE thinking (this can be toxic, too), but rather REALISTIC thinking! Check out the examples to the right.

Image Courtesy Lakes Center for Youth & Families- www.lc4yf.org/



May is Stroke Awareness Month!

This year, Nashoba Associated Boards of Health has partnered with Nashoba Valley Medical Center (NVMC), with support from a MORE Advertising grant to raise awareness of stroke symptoms and educate the community on the importance of calling 911 immediately when stroke symptoms present.

Visit our Stroke Initiative webpage, hosted on NVMC's website— it includes a series of quick videos we created in collaboration with the community to help you improve your chances of a full recovery when stroke symptoms arise.

www.nashobamed.org/newsroom/2023-04-28/respond-stroke-symptoms-fast-nvmc-partners-nashoba

Stroke Prevention Tips

Eat a healthy diet low in sodium with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Tips on nutrition are available at [CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity website](#).

Maintain a healthy weight. [CDC's Healthy Weight website](#) includes information and tools to help you lose weight.

Be physically active. Visit [CDC's Physical Activity website](#) for more.

Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke. [CDC's Office on Smoking and Health website](#) has information on quitting smoking.

Limit alcohol use. See [CDC's Alcohol and Public Health website](#) for more information.

Prevent or manage your other health conditions, especially high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity. Visit [CDC's High Blood Pressure, Cholesterol, and Diabetes webpages](#) on these conditions to learn more.

**At ANY Sign of Stroke,
Don't Hesitate...CALL 911!**

F A S T

Facial
Drooping

Arm
Weakness

Speech
Difficulty

Time to
Call 911!

Nashoba Valley Medical Center

A STEWARD FAMILY HOSPITAL



Steward

Nashoba Nursing Service & Hospice
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Kids Corner- Sal the Public Health Snake!



Photo Caption: A garter snake emerges to relax in the sun on a set of wooden stairs.

This is the NABH public health nursing office's resident garter snake! We have decided that their name is Sal. Any herpetologists out there want to weigh in on the dimorphism of garter snakes??

Sal enjoys sunning themselves on our stairs outside. Garter snakes are completely harmless, but it can be a bit of a scare if you aren't expecting to see a "nope rope!" We also know that they are VERY beneficial to the garden our groundskeeper Glenn maintains so beautifully, because they eat many common garden pests! Garter snakes are also the "state reptile" of Massachusetts.

While harmless, garter snakes can carry *Salmonella*, like many reptiles. *Salmonella* is a common bacterial illness affecting the intestinal tract, and it can cause diarrhea, stomach pains, and fever. Make sure you wash up if you are handling snakes or other reptiles (before AND after handling). It's a great idea to practice regular handwashing, anyways, to prevent the spread of many kinds of germs!

Other potential sources of *Salmonella* include eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water. Parents AND kids can remember to follow the CDC's [Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill](#) guidelines to help keep you and your family safe from *Salmonella*. Be especially careful to follow the guidelines when preparing food for young children, people with weakened immune systems, and older adults.



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Bereavement Groups, Grief Socials

Offered by Nashoba Nursing Service & Hospice

Please see our calendar at <https://www.nashoba.org/calendar> for the latest schedule.

Grief Support Groups: Conversation about Death & Grief

For more information, contact Lucia Camara at (978)425-6675

Locations and Times:

Townsend- First Wednesday of the Month: next are May 3rd and June 7th, 5:30 PM*** *please note time change; previously was 4 PM**** Townsend Senior Center, 16 Dudley Road, Townsend, MA 01469

Shirley- Second Wednesday of the Month: next are May 10th and June 14th, 11:00 AM; Shirley Senior Center, 9 Parker Road, Shirley, MA

Lunenburg- Third Wednesday of the Month: next are May 17th and June 21st, 3:30 PM; Lunenburg Adult Activity Center, 25 Memorial Dr, Lunenburg, MA

Devens- Fourth Wednesday of the Month: next are May 24th, and June 28th, 2:30 PM; Shirley Meadows Community Room, 27 Hospital Road, Devens, MA

Grief Socials

A gentle opportunity to gather and meet with others who are grieving. Gentle and light conversation to help work through the grief, meet and hear how others are getting through their grief, and realizing there is no need to go this alone. Participate in the Grief Social that best suits your needs.

Locations and Times:

Townsend- Tuesdays: May 9th and June 13th, 11:30 AM- 1 PM at The Townsend House Restaurant, 2 Depot St in Townsend, MA

Shirley- Fridays: May 19th, June 23rd, 4:30 PM to 6 PM at The Bull Run Restaurant, 215 Great Rd in Shirley, MA

Littleton- Tuesdays: April 25th, May 23rd, June 27th, 11:30 AM to 1 PM at Il Forno Restaurant, 529 King St, Littleton, MA

Grief never ends

*But it changes for it is a passage,
Not a Place to Stay.*

*Grief is not a sign of weakness,
Nor a lack of faith.....*

It is the price of LOVE....



May Well Adult Clinic Schedule

Well Adult Clinics are held monthly in each of the towns in the NABH region. Well Adult Clinics are an opportunity for adult residents to have a basic health screening and talk with their town's public health nurse for health tips and resources to promote their wellness!

Town	Clinic Location	Address	Day	Time
Ashburnham	Town Hall	32 Main St.	*Paused for now; returning in July	*Paused for now; returning in July
Ashby	Town Hall, Land Use Room	895 Main St.	*Paused for now; resuming in June	*Paused for now; resuming in June
Ayer	Senior Center	18 Pond St.	2 nd Thurs	12:30-1:30
Berlin	Town Office Building-COA office, RM 118	23 Linden St.	*Paused for now; stay tuned for updates!	*Paused for now; stay tuned for updates!
Bolton	Bolton COA	600 Main St.	*Paused for now; resuming in June	*Paused for now; resuming in June
Boxborough	Community Center	30 Middle Rd.	2 nd Wed	11-12
Dunstable	Library	588 Main St.	4 th Wed	11-12
Groton	Senior Center	163 West Main St.	4 th Wed	1:30-2:30
Harvard	Senior Center (COA)	16 Lancaster County Rd.	3 rd Tues	12:30-1:30
Lancaster	Community Center	695 Main St.	*Paused for now; stay tuned for updates!	*Paused for now; stay tuned for updates!
Littleton	COA Room 230	33 Shattuck St.	*Paused for now; stay tuned for updates!	*Paused for now; stay tuned for updates!
Lunenburg	Lunenburg Adult Activity Center	25 Memorial Dr.	4 th Thurs	9-11
Pepperell	Senior Center	37 Nashua Rd.	3 rd Wed	10-12
Shirley	Senior Center	9 Parker Rd.	*Paused for now; resuming in June	*Paused for now; resuming in June
Stow	Senior Center	509 Great Rd.	1 st Wed	10-12
Townsend	Senior Center	16 Dudley Rd.	2 nd Wed	12-2

Please see our calendar at <https://www.nashoba.org/calendar> for the most up-to-date clinic schedule.

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