

HEALTH HAPPENINGS

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

VOL. 1, PAGE 1

FEB. 2022

In this Issue: 2021 In Review, and Looking Ahead to 2022!



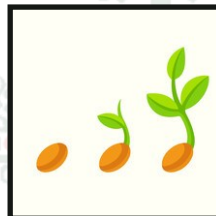
PUBLIC HEALTH
NURSING



ENVIRONMENTAL
SERVICES



HOME HEALTH &
HOSPICE



COMMUNITY
SPOTLIGHT

Greetings All, and Happy New Year! It's been a minute. We're already well into calendar year 2022 and Nashoba Associated Boards of Health (NABH) is excited to share some fresh updates and information with you! We hope that the current trend of decreasing COVID-19 cases continues, and we are presently taking the opportunity to evaluate our programming and exploring new ways to provide outreach in our communities. Read on to find out what we've been up to- wishing you a happy and healthy 2022.

What's New?

Public Health Nursing Division:

Our three public health nurses Tamara, Maureen and Susan have been hard at work keeping our communities healthy:

- Providing monthly well adult clinics in each of our towns for seniors/elders through COAs, administering flu and COVID vaccines in-home for homebound community members (over 150 home visits for vaccines since the start of 2021!)
- Coordinating and executing our COVID-19 vaccination clinics with the assistance of a dedicated group of volunteers. Weekly vaccination clinics continue through the month of February 2022. **NABH vaccination clinics by the numbers:** As of the date of this publication Nashoba has administered over **5,100 COVID vaccines** and over **2,300 flu vaccines** at **79 total clinics** since January 2021.
- Responding to *reportable infectious disease cases* in the community, including COVID-19 contact tracing and case investigation. Omitting COVID-19, our public health nurses investigated a total of **321 infectious disease cases** in 2021.

By the way... What exactly IS the role of public health in responding to communicable disease, anyways? We're glad you asked:

Under Massachusetts General Law, Boards of Health are held responsible for disease prevention and control to promote a healthy community. As part of your town assessment, Nashoba Associated Boards of Health serves as your town nurse and local public health team in partnership with your local elected Board of Health. One of the duties we perform on your town's behalf is investigating, reporting and responding to communicable disease cases which include certain foodborne, tickborne, and respiratory illnesses. Here's how it works:

We receive lab results from Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and our public health nurses contact individuals to provide assessment of symptoms and illness course, education, and discuss future prevention. Some diseases require contact tracing (it's not just for COVID!), and in other cases collaboration with state epidemiologists or Nashoba's health agents and food inspectors is helpful to try to identify a root cause and implement infection control measures to protect the community's health. The exact nature of response is dependent on the specific illness being addressed. The steps of the response are documented and reported to MDPH per State law.

Did you know? If you hear about a food recall on the news, it happened in large part because of this kind of work occurring behind the scenes in public health departments nationwide!

Utilizing MDPH grant funding, Nashoba was able to make some changes to enhance our COVID-19 response:

- Hired several case investigators who collaborate with our public health nurses, providing guidance and support to the public regarding COVID-19 isolation and quarantine. This team provides outreach to positive cases in our communities, advising community members on the most up-to-date guidelines and best practices, and provides some weekend case investigation coverage.
- Purchased a software that allows us to easily send a voice recording and text message to our new positive cases each day, thereby increasing our capacity to get the most vital information about COVID-19 safety to our community members quickly.

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VOL. 1 PAGE 2

FEB. 2022

PUBLIC HEALTH
NURSING

ENVIRONMENTAL
SERVICES

HOME HEALTH &
HOSPICE

COMMUNITY
SPOTLIGHT

What's New?

Public Health Nursing Division– cont'd:

Our Public Health Educator/Communications Specialist Jenna has been meeting with and surveying community stakeholders to identify areas of improvement for Nashoba's communication plan and education efforts in our region:

- Using survey results and community feedback to directly inform strategy- for example, 87% of survey respondents indicated that COVID-19 was very important to receive information about, so Jenna focused initial efforts on developing COVID communications.
- Updating NABH website and social media. Creating broad resource lists (ex. mental health/substance use disorder, food insecurity) and guidance documents to provide to the public. Consulting with individual Boards at their request to help develop public health communications customized to their towns: mailers, flyers, advertisements, etc.
- Going forward, Jenna plans to conduct more outreach in our towns, publish a regular newsletter, update and create new educational materials, and continue improvement efforts with an equity and inclusion lens. This means having our content be accessible and available in languages representative of our communities. Jenna will be connecting with underserved groups to bring diverse perspectives to the decision-making table. She is utilizing her social work background to identify resource gaps and collaborating with community partners to address inequities in creative ways.

Environmental Division:

The Nashoba Associated Boards of Health Environmental Division continues to work directly with the elected Boards of Health and residents in our towns, enforcing State Sanitary and Environmental Codes, Massachusetts General Laws, and local regulations:

- Throughout the pandemic and the past year our health agents have been evaluating and reinforcing workplace safety standards and advising community members as new guidance is released. This is in addition to their usual duties of investigating public health complaints and environmental concerns, inspecting dwellings as requested, inspecting camps, beaches and pools, and helping new and existing homeowners repair and replace septic systems and wells.
- Utilizing MDPH grant funding, the Environmental division was able to hire additional staff including a new health agent and a part-time food inspector to meet statutory requirements for inspections and to better provide services in the community. They were also able to obtain a software to help improve quality of food service establishments in the region by tracking conditions found at inspection and identifying any issues to be addressed with the owners.

Well, well, well... look what we have here- Some information on wells (of all things), hot off the press from our health agents in the Environmental Services division:

If you live in a rural community, there is a good chance the water provided to your home comes from a well located on your property. Unlike those who receive the water from a local municipal water department, you are responsible for ensuring your water is safe for consumption. Many individuals may be unaware of the condition of their well or of the quantity or quality of the water it supplies. The purpose of this article is to get you thinking about your well and water quality and provide you some valuable links to State and Federal resources where you can obtain more detailed information.

Well types. *There are three basic well types we see in the communities we serve. The first is an artesian or drilled well; this type of well is drilled into the water bearing zones in the bedrock and is generally signified by a 6" steel pipe protruding from the ground in your yard. A point, or driven well is generally pounded or driven in the sandy gravel soil deposit into the groundwater, which becomes the source of water delivered to your house. Lastly, depending on the age of your property, you may have a shallow or dug well. As the name implies, these wells are dug into the soil until groundwater is encountered. The hole is then lined with stone or concrete; groundwater serves as the source of water for this type of well. Regardless of the well type, you should avoid storage of hazardous materials in the area around the well and make sure this area is graded to prevent the ponding of surface water around the well. Use care when applying lawn care products around your well.*

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What's New?**Environmental Division- private wells, cont'd:**

Water testing. If you have a private well, you are responsible for testing your water to ensure it is safe to drink. We often encounter well owners who have never or rarely test their well water. Here are some things to consider regarding well water testing: Water should be tested at a Massachusetts certified laboratory. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) website, provided below, contains a link to the laboratory currently certified. You should be wary of free water testing kits left on your mail box or offered at big box hardware stores.

How often should you test your well water? The MADEP website (linked below) provides a schedule of water quality parameters to be tested and frequencies for testing. Other reasons you may consider testing are: a noticeable change in the water quality (odor, taste or color) or quantity, illness in your family that may be attributed to drinking water, and the location of your well relative to areas of suspected contamination.

As the owner of a private well, you are the person responsible for ensuring your household's drinking water is safe. The links below can provide you with a wealth of information to assist you in that task. If you have questions regarding your well or water quality, you can also contact our office and speak to the Health Agent serving your community.

Further Reading:

- ◆ <https://www.mass.gov/private-wells>
- ◆ <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/protect-your-family-a-guide-to-water-quality-testing-for-private-wells>
- ◆ <https://www.epa.gov/privatewells>

Nashoba Nursing Service and Hospice:

- Nashoba's Home Health division continues to offer high quality in-home care to help patients heal and regain their independence. The Home Health division is currently onboarding two new staff members (an RN and an LPN). Thanks to generous donations from the Friends of Nashoba Nursing Service & Hospice non-profit and others, the Home Health division has been able to obtain new occupational therapy equipment and wound care supplies to increase patient comfort and safety.
- Nashoba's Hospice division provides 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. Did you know that our Hospice division offers regular grief support groups and grief socials for our patients and the community? Contact us at 978-425-6675 to learn more.

February is Black History Month- Let's Acknowledge Some of the Contributions of Black Americans in Public Health:

Mary Beatrice Davidson Kenner was a Black inventor from Monroe, NC. She invented an adjustable sanitary pad belt, a predecessor of the sanitary menstrual pad as we know it today. Her invention was initially rejected due to racial discrimination and sexism, and was finally developed and manufactured in 1956, 30 years after it was initially conceptualized. Mary Beatrice Davidson Kenner also co-invented the toilet tissue holder with her sister, **Mildred Davidson Austin Smith**. The patent for this invention was granted in 1882.

Dr. Virginia M. Alexander was a Black physician and public health expert. A Philadelphia native, Dr. Alexander persevered through the barriers of racism to complete her education, internship and residency, and later converted part of her home into a three-bed hospital to treat Black patients who experienced racism from white staff in local hospitals. She earned a Master's degree in public health from Yale University, and in 1935 conducted a study on the alarming disparities in health outcomes among Black and white residents in N. Philadelphia, calling attention to the role of systemic racism in health disparities nationwide.

Bernard Challenor was a public health professional and professor at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, where he served as acting Dean from 1978-80. Throughout the 1960s he worked for several major public health entities including the World Health Organization (WHO) and was the first African American appointed as an Epidemiological Intelligence Service Officer at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1965. Some of his international work included efforts to vaccinate against and eradicate smallpox.

There are many more Black health and public health professionals throughout history who have had an immeasurably valuable impact on how we conceptualize and engage in public health work today. Due to systemic and structural barriers, many of these contributions are unrecognized or underrecognized. We can all do our part to learn more about these public health heroes and spread awareness of their work as we continue to carry the torch of protecting and promoting the wellbeing of all people in all communities.



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PUBLIC HEALTH
NURSING

ENVIRONMENTAL
SERVICES

HOME HEALTH &
HOSPICE

COMMUNITY
SPOTLIGHT

Community Spotlight-We asked, our community answered: What's new with your neighbors in Nashoba's district?

-Ashburnham: The Stevens Memorial Library started a free seed bank on Saturday, February 12th! They have dozens of flower, herb and vegetable seeds, as well as an array of gardening items and tools that can be borrowed by library patrons.

-Ashby: The Friends of Ashby Playground are hosting a Family Fun 5K Run/Walk on June 12, 2022. Save the date; more information forthcoming this Spring!

<https://ashby-ma-us.blogspot.com/2022/02/family-fun-5k-runwalk-with-friends-of.html>

-Ayer: Ayer has a new rental assistance program funded through the town's Community Preservation Act (CPA). Eligible households may receive monthly rental assistance of \$500 per month for one year through this program.

<https://www.ayer.ma.us/home/news/rental-assistance-program-now-available>

-Berlin: Hired a new police chief in January 2022. Chief Eric Schartner has served on the local police force for more than 25 years. He is a dedicated public servant who is well-connected and familiar with the community and brings many years of extensive schooling and training to the table.

-Bolton: Bolton Board of Health would like to acknowledge the towns' high COVID-19 vaccination rate. As of February 3, 2022, per the weekly vaccine report, 93.5% of Bolton residents are fully vaccinated, and 72.4% of Bolton residents who are eligible have received a booster vaccine.

-Boxborough: In acknowledgement that 1 in 12 individuals in Massachusetts are facing hunger, Boxborough UCC opened a Little Free Pantry in June of 2021, available 24/7 at 723 Massachusetts Ave for anyone who might benefit.

<https://www.boxboroughucc.org/little-free-pantry/>

-Dunstable: The Morgan Babcock scholarship is now accepting applications from resident students of Dunstable as they continue their education. This scholarship symbolizes Dunstable's community strength and resilience. In 1923, a fire destroyed the Morgan family's home, and the citizens of Dunstable stepped up to take in all seventeen of the family's children and helped reconstruct their dwelling. One of the children, Helen Morgan Babcock, wanted to give back to the people of Dunstable and thus established this fund.

<https://www.dunstable-ma.gov/home/news/message-trustees-morgan-babcock-scholarship-0>

-Groton: In agreement with Groton's Diversity Task Force's recommendation and the American Library Association's statement on overdue fines as a social and economic barrier to access and use of the library, the Groton Library Trustees voted to eliminate all overdue fines for library materials forever and retroactively, effective September 1st, 2021.

-Harvard: Harvard purchased an analytical device that allows their Health Agent to sample and analyze water from the Bare Hill Pond swimming beach for same day results. Thanks to this, HBOH was able to keep residents informed of harmful algae blooms and water quality at the Town Beach.

-Lancaster: Lancaster has received a grant to install 10 air quality monitors throughout the town!

-Littleton: The Littleton Fire Department has teamed up with Littleton Elder and Human Services to assist the senior community with free smoke and carbon monoxide detector inspections and installations by appointment.

-Lunenburg: The Lunenburg Conservation Commission was awarded a Recreational Trails Program Grant in 2021, enabling them to make a variety of improvements to existing trails on conservation land and increase access to maps and trail use literature for the public.

<https://www.lunenburgma.gov/boards-commissions-committees/conservation-commission/lunenburg-trails-grant>

-Pepperell: Pepperell has just hired their first social worker to help support the psychosocial wellbeing of residents. Jessica Lundeen, LSW will be working with individuals, children, families, and groups of all ages in town!

-Shirley: With the support of the HEALing Communities Study, a "Naloxbox" was installed in the Shirley Police Department. Naloxboxes save lives; they contain naloxone, the opioid overdose reversal drug, and are stored similarly to an AED or fire extinguisher in a public-facing space.

<https://www.healingcommunitiesstudy.org/communities/mashirley-and-townsend.html>

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ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

HOME HEALTH & HOSPICE

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Community Spotlight Cont'd-We asked, our community answered:

What's new with your neighbors in Nashoba's district?

-Stow: The Stow Board of Health wants to recognize their Town Administrator's support and collaboration over the past year. Denise Demboski has helped the BOH promote a healthy community by facilitating regular communications to the town across a variety of platforms about health, factors that influence it, and how to improve it.

-Townsend: Townsend's North Middlesex Cares organization opened a drop-in center downtown at 241 Main St. with the support of the HEALing Communities Study. The drop-in center is available to people in the North Middlesex community and is meant to serve as a safe, welcoming space for people experiencing a substance use disorder or in recovery. There are computers for use, coffee, tea, snacks, books, puzzles, a community closet, and more. The Center is positioned to evolve based on the needs of the surrounding community.

A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words: Nashoba's Year in Pictures



Left column top to bottom: Sharon Veasie (Director of Admin & Tech/Medical Records), Jeff Paster (Lancaster BOH Chair/Vaccination Clinic Volunteer) and Tamara Bedard (Community Health Manager) at a vaccination clinic; Maureen Scott (Public Health Nurse) receives a vaccination from Cindy Jaksina, RN, a volunteer at a Boxborough Regency vaccination clinic; one of our region's school nurses poses with a physician volunteer, Dr. Ruze, after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.



Right column top to bottom: Our fearless public health nurses Maureen Scott, Tamara Bedard and Susan Hoag bringing peace, love and vaccines to our Clear Path for Veterans New England Devens regional vaccination clinic; Susan and Maureen smiling behind all their clinic PPE and getting ready to vaccinate; and lastly, a table setting from our School Nurse Appreciation luncheon in August 2021.

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