

WHY STATE FUNDING FOR LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH MATTERS:

GROWING DEMANDS, SHRINKING RESOURCES

In our globalized, connected world, local health departments (LHDs) are the first line of defense against new and potentially wide-spread public health crises. LHDs are also at the center of the social determinants of health, and are involved with community efforts to address poverty, transportation barriers, nutrition, physical activity and housing. Public Health is the linchpin that all other agencies turn to—and not just in times of crisis. LHDs responded to these and other ongoing and growing public health demands in 2017, despite diminishing resources and staff.

HEROIN, FENTANYL, AND PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER EPIDEMIC

The ongoing opioid abuse crisis is a public health epidemic throughout the state. To combat this crisis, local health departments:

Teach law enforcement, emergency responders and individuals who may interact with opioid users to properly administer Naloxone to block or reverse the effects of opioid overdose to increase the chances of survival.

Work with hospitals, coroners and medical examiners, and law enforcement to track overdose data to inform prevention efforts.

Convene and participate in task force initiatives to raise awareness and bring struggling communities together to find solutions to this growing problem.

Identify services and treatment options for those struggling with opioid addictions.

Educate health care providers on the need to reduce opioid prescriptions.

Promote diversion efforts, such as drug take-back programs, to reduce access to unused prescription opioids.

Address the dramatic overlap of opioid abuse with maternal child health programs due to the high use of drugs during pregnancy, and infants born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).



ZIKA VIRUS, LYME, BABESESIA AND OTHER VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

In 2016, Zika virus proved that, in a globalized and connected world, health crises in other parts of the world can quickly impact local communities in New York. In 2017, deaths from the rare Powassan Virus, as well as the spread of Lyme, Babesiosis and other tick-borne diseases, once again highlight the need for ongoing surveillance and health education efforts.

To respond, LHDs need resources to:

Inform the public and pregnant patients about travel risks and report on, and share information about, new Zika virus cases in local communities.

Investigate reports of Lyme and other tickborne diseases, including follow-up on reports of disease.

Educate the public on prevention of tick bites, tick removal and signs and symptoms of tick-borne diseases.

Investigate and track reports from hospitals and health care providers about suspected cases of Zika virus and other arboviral diseases, such as West Nile Virus or Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE).

Conduct mosquito surveillance in the Spring and Summer to monitor for the presence of mosquito and tick species capable of transmitting arthropod-borne diseases.

Undertake mosquito control activities, such as larvaciding, and when needed, aerial spraying, to reduce mosquito populations.



DRINKING WATER QUALITY

LHDs addressed numerous water quality concerns, including harmful algal blooms, potential lead hazards in school drinking water, unregulated contaminants in public water supplies, and water main breaks. To protect the public from these and other drinking water threats, LHDs:

Close beaches and assure testing and safety of drinking water supplies where harmful algal blooms and other bacteria or parasites may pose a health risk.

Provide technical assistance to public water suppliers and schools regarding sampling, testing, interpretation of results and steps to address risks related to sample results.

Educate the public regarding potential health risks of lead, harmful algal blooms, or other contaminants.

Issue boil water advisories and educate the public on steps to take to assure that they are using safe water for drinking and bathing.

Monitor for public health risks including various ailments associated with water contamination.

Coordinate with state and federal authorities when emerging contaminants are identified in drinking water supplies to educate the public regarding available, scientific evidence related to potential health risks.

LEGIONNAIRES ' DISEASE

LHDs continued to respond to cases of Legionnaires' Disease in 2017.

LHDs used what resources they could to implement new, unfunded mandates to:

Assure compliance with regulations related to registration, maintenance and system testing of all cooling towers in their communities.

Gather information from patients as to their recent whereabouts to determine the source of transmission and prevent future outbreaks.

Work with facilities identified as possible sources of disease to decontaminate cooling towers and other sources of the bacteria.

Assure proper notification to the state health department and public is made when cooling tower samples tested higher than state set limits.

Provide the community with answers to questions concerning outbreaks and ways to stay healthy and safe.



VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASE OUTBREAKS

Mumps outbreaks occurred throughout the state, mainly among college students on several upstate campuses. LHDs responded quickly to:

Conduct disease case investigations to identify possible contacts who might be at risk of contracting the disease.

Relay accurate information about the mumps, including risk assessment, symptoms, vaccination options, and facts about the outbreak at large.

Contain the virus and protect the public by vaccinating unvaccinated individuals potentially exposed to the disease.

Coordinate with college health services regarding disease control protocols and investigations.

Disseminate information on the outbreaks, disease symptoms and reporting requirements to the health care providers in their community.

Educate the public on mumps symptoms and ways to prevent the spread of the disease.