

## December 2024

### Health Officer's Update

Hello and Happy Holidays to All! As we move into the holiday season and towards the close of 2024, I want to take this time to look back at some of our health wins as a county in a few key areas:

- **Behavioral Health and Substance Use:** September 2024 we announced the opening of the Mountain Manor Treatment Center for adolescents in Baltimore, MD in partnership with the Maryland Department of Health. This center provides inpatient substance use treatment for adolescents. It accepts Medicaid and has resources for uninsured youth. As of November 2024, the county saw a 48% decrease in total fatal overdoses compared to last year and a 58% decrease in fentanyl related deaths. This decline can be attributed to several factors including public health education on the risks in all age groups, as well as education and increasing availability of Narcan/naloxone across the county.
- **Youth Safety:** DHHS is wrapping up a yearlong initiative to address short, medium, and long-term solutions for youth violence/victimization, self-harm/suicidality, and substance use. Between March to November 2024, we met with community partners and youth to identify youth safety challenges and trends they are seeing in the community. A recurring theme is the need for a coordinating entity to set the agenda for youth in the county. This entity would support: Community and Youth Engagement, Centralized Coordination, Youth Advocacy, Cross-Sector Partnerships and Capacity Building. Conversations with the Steering Committee members and Directors are still ongoing.
- **Communicable Disease Control:** COVID is low, flu is low, but rising, RSV is moderate-especially in kids. It's not too late to get this year's COVID and flu vaccines and RSV if indicated. We continue to monitor state and hospital COVID data as well as wastewater surveillance through the CDC. You can see levels here- [COVID-19 Wastewater Data – Current Levels | NWSS | CDC](#).
- **Maternal and Child Health:** The 2024 [Maternal and Child Health \(MCH\) Report](#) is now available. The report shares data on maternal and infant health topics from 2012-2021. While we are proud that our county outperforms state and national averages on many health indicators, we must acknowledge and address the disparities that exist. The data reveals troubling differences in pregnancy-related outcomes among racial and ethnic groups, with non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women facing significantly higher risks of severe maternal morbidity compared to their non-Hispanic White counterparts. We continue to applaud the work of the Montgomery Perinatal Program, Babies Born Healthy, and SMILE in addressing this disparity.
- **Community and Public Health:** DHHS launched the [Montgomery County Community and Population Health Data Dashboard](#). It is a collection of high-quality data offering insights on population and demographics, health-focused topics like disease rates and mental health, and other measures on transportation, housing, food security, and education. The Dashboard will also serve to streamline Montgomery County's [Community Health Needs Assessments \(CHNA\)](#) and track the

measures within the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). It is a hybrid of national, state, and locally maintained data and was made possible with support from Nexxus Montgomery.

In December we're also recognizing **World AIDS Day**. It is observed December 1st to raise awareness about the ongoing fight against HIV/AIDS, honor those who have lost their lives to the disease, and support those living with HIV. This year was the fourth annual summit held in partnership with Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc to highlight the disproportionate impact HIV and other STIs have had on Black women. Four in 5 women living with diagnosed HIV in the county are Black (80.7%).

To address this, we established the Black Women's Sexual Health Working Group to convene Black women leaders in healthcare, sexual health, community-based and faith-based initiatives to review the "what": what do we know about these disparities, discuss the "why," to analyze their root causes, and determine the "how," how do we move forward with a plan that supports Black women's wellness?

Some interesting themes emerged from conversations with this group:

- Black women are not being offered HIV and other sexual health screenings by our healthcare providers, and that not a lot of our healthcare providers look like us.
- Black women don't see themselves in advertisements for PrEP, the HIV prevention medication.
- There is still a lot of stigma and shame about sexual topics, especially HIV, that prevent us from talking about and taking care of our sexual health needs.
- Black women are caregivers, breadwinners, and just plain busy. So busy that sometimes sexual health, and overall self-care takes a backseat.

The group has already started to address these issues through changes in targeted advertisements and education to healthcare professionals. Also, take a moment to review the new [Ending the HIV Epidemic dashboard](#). Ending HIV is possible when all who have HIV know their status, get timely treatment to undetectable levels, and those at risk are on preventive treatments.

Finally, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to each of you for your dedication, hard work, and unwavering commitment to the health and well-being of those we serve. This time of year, is an opportunity to reconnect with loved ones, recharge, and reflect on all that we have accomplished together. I encourage everyone to take the time to enjoy the festivities, but also to prioritize your safety and well-being. Let's continue to support one another, embrace the spirit of kindness, and look forward to a bright and healthy new year.

Wishing you and your families a joyful holiday season filled with peace, health, and happiness. I look forward to working with you in 2025 as we remain committed to making our community a healthier, happier place to live, work, and play!



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