

HEALTH OFFICER UPDATE

January 2026

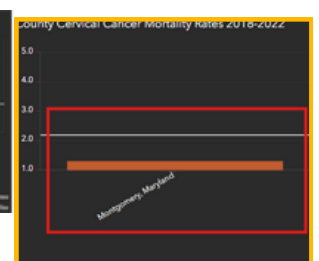
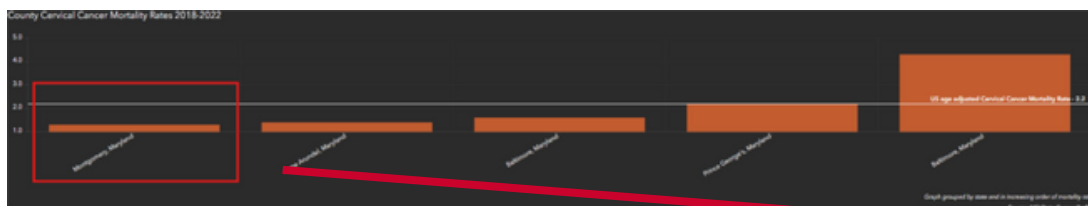
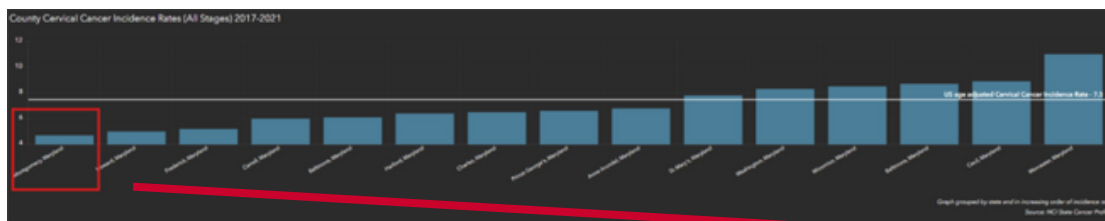
*Happy
New Year* 2026

We hope you had a joyful holiday season filled with magical moments with loved ones. A heartfelt thank you goes out to all the first responders who worked tirelessly through the holidays to keep our communities safe, you are truly appreciated. As we step into 2026, our commitment to advancing health equity and addressing everyday issues impacting our communities remains stronger than ever. This month's newsletter brings you important public health updates, upcoming events, and additional resources. We encourage you to share these valuable insights within your networks and join us in making a difference together.



Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. Montgomery County continues to lead the state with lowest incidence (at all stages) and mortality rates of cervical cancer. However, disparities persist among those affected. Notably, Hispanic residents experience the highest incidence rates.



Source: Cervical Cancer Data Dashboard, American Cancer Society & National Roundtable on Cervical Cancer

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Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers as a result of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine and cervical cancer screening (1). Prevention and early detection are key. The American Cancer Society Guidelines for Cervical Cancer Screening recommends that women and other individuals with a cervix at average risk should start screening at age 25 and continue until at least age 65 (2). The HPV vaccine can prevent over 90% of cancers caused by HPV (1). The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends routine HPV vaccination for all adolescents starting between age 9 and 12 years (3).

Montgomery County offers safety net programs for those who are seeking cervical cancer screening and HPV vaccines:

- **Cervical Cancer Screening:** Montgomery Cares is a safety net medical program that provides basic medical services. Some of the Montgomery Cares participating clinics offer cervical screenings. You can visit the Montgomery Cares website to see if you are eligible and enroll:
<https://www.primarycarecoalition.org/montgomerycaresorg.html>
- **HPV Vaccines:** HPV vaccines are available to children who are uninsured or have Medicaid at Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services Health Centers through the Vaccines for Children Program. You can visit our website to make an appointment: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/PHS/PHSImmunizations-p275.html>. Those with private insurance should talk with their PCP about how to obtain it.

National Blood Donor Month

Every 2 seconds someone in the U.S. needs blood and or platelets (4). Since 1969, January has been designated as National Blood Donor month to honor the voluntary blood donors and encourage more people to give blood. By donating blood, you can save more than one life. The American Red Cross is partnering with the NFL during National Blood Donor Month to address blood shortage. All who come to give blood or platelets January 1 to 25, 2026 will automatically be entered for a chance to win a



trip for two to Super Bowl LX, in partnership with the NFL. For full details, visit RedCrossBlood.org/SuperBowl. To find a blood drive near you by visiting the American Red Cross [website](#).

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Give blood.
Dona Sangre
Help save lives.
Ayuda a salvar vidas



Grace United Methodist Church Social Hall

119 N. Frederick Avenue
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

Friday, January 16, 2026, 10:00AM-3:00PM

Please call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767), visit RedCrossBlood.org or scan the QR code and enter code GRACEUMC to schedule an appointment.

Sponsored by Project SPIRIT Sickle Cell (PSSC), Inc.
Hosted by Grace UMC, Gaithersburg

Remember to bring a photo ID (driver's license or Red Cross donor card). Eat a healthy breakfast/lunch with foods that are high in iron and vitamin C. Double up on your water intake as it is important to be well hydrated.



Those who identify as Black or African American are needed to help us meet the needs of those with sickle cell.

Come to give Jan. 1-25 for a chance to win trip for 2 to Super Bowl LX in Cali!
For Terms and Conditions: Please Visit [HERE](#)

1-800-RED CROSS | 1-800-733-2767 | RedCrossBlood.org | Download the Blood Donor App

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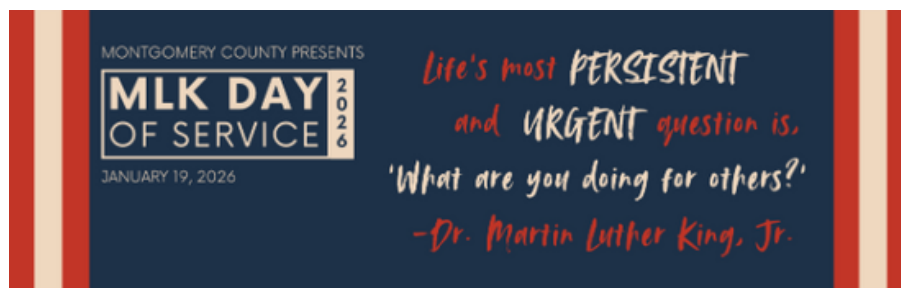
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Martin Luther King Jr Day

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are You doing for others?'" - Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr Day is day of remembrance of his tireless advocacy for racial equality and a changemaker during the civil rights movement. To honor Dr. King, this day is also a call to action to serve one another and work hand in hand to build a stronger community. The Montgomery County Volunteer Center is holding the MLK Day of Service on Monday, January 19 in which attendees will have the opportunity to participate in service projects and engage with local non-profit organizations in the County. To learn more about this event and to register, visit the [Montgomery County Volunteer Center website](#).



Respiratory Virus

Montgomery County health officials are advising communities and healthcare facilities that the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has issued a statewide recommendation to wear masks in all patient facing health care settings. This recommendation comes as the statewide respiratory virus-associated hospitalization rate has exceeded the threshold of 10 hospitalizations per 100,000 residents. Vaccinations remain the best way to reduce severe illness, hospitalizations, and strain on the health care system.

- Annual **flu** vaccination is recommended for everyone ages 6 months and older, with high-dose options for adults 65 and older and a nasal spray option for many children and adults.
- **RSV** protection is also available, including vaccines for older adults and pregnant individuals to protect newborns, as well as antibody protection for high-risk infants during RSV season.

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- The updated **COVID-19** vaccine is designed to protect against currently circulating strains and is recommended for older adults, people with underlying health conditions, pregnant individuals, and many children, and remains widely available and covered by insurance in Maryland.
- **Access:** Documentation is not required to prove immunocompromised status. Vaccinators are explicitly instructed not to deny vaccination due to a lack of medical records or paperwork.

Vaccination remains the most effective way to protect yourself, your family, and the community during this respiratory virus surge.

Read more in our press release [here](#).

Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Roundtable

On January 12, 2026, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in collaboration with Adventist HealthCare, Holy Cross Health, MedStar Health (MedStar Montgomery Medical Center) and Johns Hopkins Medicine (Suburban Hospital) will be hosting the **Community Health Improvement Plan Roundtable**. The session will highlight key findings from the report, the county's priority areas, and collaborative efforts aimed at improving health outcomes for our community.

We look forward to hearing from you and our Montgomery County community on strategies to shape and advance health equity.

Thank you for taking the time to stay informed and engaged. Together, we can continue to advance health equity, promote prevention, and create a healthy Montgomery County for all. We encourage you to share this information with your networks and join us in upcoming initiatives.

Your voice and participation make a difference.

Here's to a healthy and impactful start to 2026!

Dr. Kisha Davis
Chief Health Officer
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

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(1) CDC. (2015). Cancers Cause by HPV. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/about/cancers-caused-by-hpv.html#:~:text=Recommendations-,HPV%20vaccination%20can%20prevent%20over%2090%25%20of%20cancers%20caused%20by,child%27s%20doctor%20about%20HPV%20vaccination.>

(2) American Cancer Society. (2025). The American Cancer Society Guideline for Cervical Cancer Screening. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/cervical-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/cervical-cancer-screening-guidelines.html>

(3) AAP. (2025). Human Papillomavirus Vaccines. Patient Care. <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/immunizations/human-papillomavirus-vaccines/how-to-recommend-hpv-vaccination/>

(4) American Red Cross. (n.d.). Facts About Blood Needs. <https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/how-to-donate/how-blood-donations-help/blood-needs-blood-supply.html>