

September 2024

Health Officer's Update

Hello everyone!

Fall is my favorite time of year with crisp, shorter days, back to school, and a reminder to prepare for the coming winter. And that means preparing for respiratory virus season. The last few weeks have seen some of the highest COVID rates since January. We are excited to learn that the updated COVID-19 vaccination is now available and has started appearing in pharmacies. The annual flu shot is also available. Consider getting them together to save yourself a trip. Anyone over 75, or over 60 with increased risk of severe RSV, should also get the RSV vaccine if you haven't already. If you recently had COVID consider waiting 3 months before getting the updated shot to maximize vaccine effectiveness.

We are also seeing an uptick in several other respiratory viruses including:

- **Parvovirus B19** (Fifth's Disease or "Slapped Cheek Syndrome"): Pregnant women should take extra caution around persons with Parvovirus, as infection can cause anemia in the baby.
- **Pertussis** (Whooping Cough): There is a vaccine for Pertussis, it is recommended that pregnant women receive the Tdap (tetanus + pertussis) vaccine during their 27th - 36th week of pregnancy. I encourage anyone who will have frequent contact with the baby also get it if you are due (and get your COVID, Flu, and RSV vaccines too 😊).

In September we're also recognizing two significant health awareness campaigns:

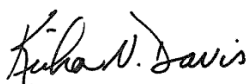
- **National Sickle Cell Awareness Month:** Sickle cell disease is a genetic condition that primarily affects minority populations, especially African Americans. Individuals with sickle cell face frequent hospitalizations, chronic pain, and an increased risk of stroke, especially in children. Despite advances in treatment, disparities in healthcare access mean that many still struggle with managing the disease. Raising awareness and supporting research is crucial to improving quality of life for those affected. The Maryland Sickle Cell Disease Association has resources and information. They are hosting a statewide family picnic on Saturday Sept 14th. More information is available [here](#).
- **National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month:** Sadly, an average of 624 Marylanders die by suicide each year, resulting in the loss of thousands of years of potential life. It's estimated that every suicide impacts 135 people, reaching far across our communities. Suicide is also the second leading cause of death for youth aged 10-14 in Maryland, and the third leading cause for young adults aged 15-34.

Older men, particularly those over 75, have the highest rates of suicide. Additionally, firearm use accounts for 45% of suicides in Maryland. Black youth are facing rising suicide rates, with the rate for ages 10-19 increasing 54% since 2018. These alarming trends remind us how vital it is to recognize the signs of mental distress and provide support for those in need.

Maryland Department of Health released the [Maryland Action Plan to Prevent Suicide in Schools \(MAPS\)](#), a comprehensive reference guide which aims to equip K-12 public and private school communities with the necessary tools for effective suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. MAPS provides evidence-based resources tailored for school administrators, mental health professionals, teachers, students, and caregivers.

If you or someone you know is struggling, reach out right away. You can make a difference in reducing the stigma around mental health, promoting available resources, and standing with those who may be silently suffering. Remember, there's always help, whether through hotlines, counseling services, or simply reaching out to a trusted friend or family member.

Thanks for your commitment to making our community a healthier, happier place to live, work, and play!



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