

# HEALTHY CITY THRIVING FAMILIES



A Quarterly Update from the City of Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support

October - December 2005

## Minneapolis Public Health Lab: Testing One, Two, Three

The internet makes it easy to find many programs that otherwise fly below the radar of public awareness. A recent example is the Minneapolis Public Health Laboratory, which appeared in the Sept. 19 issue of the Downtown Journal (formerly Skyway News). Chemists Brenda Maldonado and Becky Willis discussed the street drugs analysis program, which offers free testing for identification of suspected street drugs. The reporter found out about the program from the MDHFS website, as do many others with a need for this service. Although the lab handles only about 10 to 20 "street drug" samples yearly, it serves an important function. Parents who find questionable items in their kids' bedrooms are able to determine the true nature of the substance. While Maldonado and Willis have seen their share of Caribou Coffee mints or even wax submitted for testing, about 25 percent of suspicious substances actually are illegal drugs.

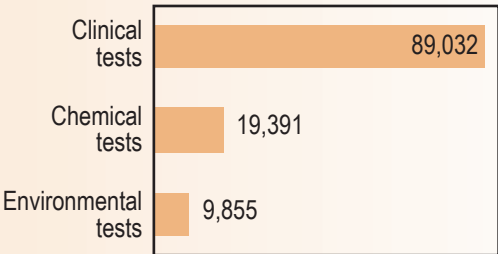
The Minneapolis Public Health Laboratory also reaches beyond the City's borders for its drug analysis work with law enforcement. Minneapolis Police, Hennepin County, and numerous local police departments frequently use the lab's services. The lab consistently rates high praise for its high quality testing and quick turnaround, particularly from judges and attorneys needing evidence to prosecute felony drug cases.

Another area of expertise involves environmental testing. The lab performs water testing for the Minneapolis Park Board, Hennepin County Environmental Services and several watershed districts. The lab tests food for the City's Environmental Services division and

tests for lead in paint, dust, soil, water for state, county and local agencies and the public throughout Minnesota.

A third area of expertise is clinical testing, the traditional lab function where test results are fed back to health care providers. Main users of this service include the department's school-based clinics serving Minneapolis high school students, Hennepin County's Health Assessment and Promotion Clinic and Healthcare for the Homeless Project, private physicians and clinics and the general public. The three areas of expertise are unusual in one lab, spanning chemical, clinical, and environmental testing. "We call it 'testing one, two, three,'" says Tom Oehler, lab manager.

2004 Test Volume



Overall, the lab performed 118,000 tests during 2004, up from nearly 84,000 in 2003. "Environmental testing is an area of potential growth for us," states Oehler. "We have a relatively recent partnership with Minneapolis Parks and Recreation and Hennepin County Environmental Services to test beach water quality in the summer, and we want to continue this activity."

*Continued on page 2*

## Meth Use Among Men

Reports indicate that methamphetamine use, which started in rural areas of Minnesota, is on the rise in Minneapolis. Equally troubling is new research indicating that methamphetamine users identifying themselves as gay or bisexual are contracting HIV at three times the rate of non-methamphetamine users. Some men are abandoning safer sex practices while on methamphetamine, and that can contribute to the rise in new HIV cases.

To raise awareness, MDHFS joined forces with area health outreach workers to sponsor two educational forums titled Meth, Sex, and Men addressing methamphetamine use in Minneapolis' gay and bisexual community.

*Continued on page 2*

## INSIDE HCTF

**GULF DISASTER RESPONSE TURNS INTO MINNEAPOLIS PREPAREDNESS DRILL**  
PAGE TWO

**MINNEAPOLIS PROJECT FOR LEAD-SAFE KIDS**  
PAGE THREE

**URBAN HEALTH AGENDA: HEALTHY, ACTIVE RESIDENTS**  
PAGE THREE

**HEALTHY CITY UPDATES**  
PAGE FOUR

## Public Health Lab from page 1

Dr. Norm Crouch, director of the Public Health Laboratory for the Minnesota Department of Health, sees the Minneapolis Public Health Laboratory as “on the front line of defense, identifying infectious agents that may be involved in outbreaks of infectious diseases. They provide a very valuable service, and their role in public health is very important.”

The lab is a cost-effective operation, earning 80 percent to 90 percent of its budget each year in service charges.” Their fees are based on full-cost accounting, so the City does not subsidize the lab services to either internal or external purchasers. For more information or to schedule a tour of the lab, contact Tom Oehler at 612-673-2610.

## The Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support (MDHFS)

### VISION:

Healthy residents, communities and environments.



**MISSION:** to provide leadership in meeting the unique needs of our urban population by engaging partners in promoting individual, community and environmental health and eliminating disparities.

### Gretchen Musicant, Commissioner

250 South Fourth Street  
Room 510  
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1384

612/673-2301

[www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs)

If you need this document in an alternative format, please call 612/673-2301 or TTY 612/673-2157 (General City Information). Please allow a reasonable amount of time for special needs accommodation.

## Meth Use Among Men from page 1

The forums were developed and funded in partnership with the Red Door Clinic’s HIM Program, Minnesota AIDS Project’s Pride Alive, the Aliveness Project, Youth and AIDS Project, Man to Man at the University of Minnesota, the Minneapolis Urban League, and Pillsbury United Communities.

More than 200 people attended one of the two forums, which featured former methamphetamine users, drug treatment center directors and an HIV specialist. Audience members shared stories of their addictions and provided

insight into how educational messages might be translated into community action. The goals of the forums were to educate the gay and bisexual community about methamphetamine and some of its negative impacts, to develop a community response to methamphetamine use, and to raise awareness with health professionals about the impact of methamphetamine for gay and bisexual users.

One of the next steps will be to conduct a focus group among men who attended the forum to better understand the role public health entities can play in this issue. For more information, contact David Rak at 612-673-3141.

# Gulf disaster response turns into Minneapolis preparedness drill

As the magnitude of the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico unfolded in September, Minnesota responders were busy gearing up to help. A massive effort took place at Camp Ripley in northern Minnesota where workers set up a reception center to house Hurricane Katrina evacuees on a short term basis. MDHFS emergency preparedness coordinator Pam Blixt was deployed to help set up behavioral health services but was recalled after one day when it was determined that the Camp Ripley site would not be used. The focus of response efforts then turned to establishing the Minnesota State Assistance Center in Saint Paul. The center became a one-stop

shop where people who arrived on their own from the Gulf of Mexico region could learn about assistance, housing and job opportunities, receive counseling, and shop a free store for supplies and clothing. Blixt again was involved with the behavioral health component and supported the volunteer counselors from the Red Cross and local mental health organizations. “Although the hurricane relief effort took a different turn than we first anticipated, it was a valuable experience in gearing up a full-scale emergency response,” Blixt stated. The State Assistance Center stayed open through September 30.



*Shoulder to Shoulder: Raising Teens Together project received an award from the National Association of Counties. The award was presented at the September 22nd meeting of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners. Shoulder to Shoulder targets parents of teens with resources and support for the joys and challenges of raising teenagers. Representatives receiving the award include Kathy Hedin and Julie Seiber from St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health, Lisa Mueller from Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health, Rose Allen from the University of Minnesota Extension Services, Cindy Kallstrom from MDHFS, Jodell O’Connell and Karen Wahlund, Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department. Visit [www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org](http://www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org) for more information.*

# Minneapolis Project for Lead-Safe Kids

It is an ambitious national goal and Minneapolis embraces it: eliminate lead poisoning by 2010. A major step forward in Minneapolis begins in November with new funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). While this goal may seem hard to achieve, "it's absolutely the right thing to strive for," states Megan Ellingson, the MDHFS staffer overseeing the project.

In 2001, Minneapolis had 109 cases of children with lead levels high enough to trigger a state-mandated intervention. In 2004, the number of cases dropped to 59. Getting that number as close as possible to zero is the top priority for the MPLS Kids project. Partners include the City's Environmental Services Division, Sustainable Resources Center, Way to Grow, Minnesota Visiting Nurse Agency, Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association and the Stairstep Foundation. For a short summary of the project, including goals, tasks, and activities, contact Ellingson at 612-673-3817.



*Young children are getting testing for lead poisoning at MPLS Kids' Health-O-Ween event held at the Waite House in south Minneapolis on October 24th. Over 250 people participated in this event.*

## Urban Health Agenda: Healthy, Active Residents



Steps to a Healthier Minneapolis, a five-year, federally funded initiative aiming to increase physical activity and good nutrition, and decrease tobacco use, recently conducted focus groups among racial and ethnic communities in Minneapolis. More than 200 Minneapolis residents from the African American, American Indian, non-Hispanic white, Southeast Asian, and Latino communities participated in the groups. Participants were residents from the Phillips, Near North, or Northeast geographic areas of Minneapolis, which are priority areas for the Steps initiative.

The goals of the focus groups were to learn more about people's physical activity and nutrition needs, possible barriers to healthy behaviors, and unique factors in these three areas affecting people's capacity to be healthy, active residents.

### Who participated?

The majority of the participants were women, which is true with most focus groups. In an effort to ensure broad participation in the focus groups, organizers recruited "familybuilders," people who have children under 18 living in their households or who have some responsibility for young people in this age group. By targeting "familybuilders" for the focus groups, the Steps initiative could influence both children and adults in Minneapolis households.

In addition, focus group organizers made it a priority to hold the sessions in culturally appropriate venues. The five Hispanic/Latino groups were all conducted in Spanish, and the two Hmong and one Laotian group had interpreters in their languages. The six American Indian and six African American groups were conducted by facilitators of the same culture, and held in trusted community locations.

### What was learned?

Several common themes emerged among the groups around healthy eating and physical activity: a desire to be positive role models for children, a concern for cost and time barriers, a desire for neighborhood safety, and the belief that quantity of food

is a higher priority than quality. Cheaper food (which is often the least nutritionally sound) is what gets purchased because it is a way to make money last through the month.

And while there were shared themes among the groups, there were also differences. The Latino and Southeast Asian groups reported wanting to know how to cook American food in a healthier way. The Latino and African American groups expressed the desire to have physical activity and nutrition programs for the family, and did not want to be separated from their spouses/partners or children. The Hmong and Laotian groups, however, were more interested in programs for groups of women, and the men in these groups wanted to do physical activity alone. The American Indian groups did not like the idea of relating fitness classes to their culture. The Latino groups wanted physical fitness and nutrition activities that would help them adapt to the climate, food and life in Minnesota.

For a summary of the focus groups, contact David Rak at 612-673-3141 or visit [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dhfs) under the "new and noteworthy" section.

# Healthy City Updates

## Funding awards

**Steps to a Healthier Minneapolis** was awarded \$712,500 to continue for a second year from Sept. 22, 2005 to Sept. 21, 2006. This funding comes from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through the Minnesota Department of Health. See page 3 for more on Steps, or call Patty Bowler at 612-673-3009.

**Seen on da Streets** was awarded \$279,000 to continue for a third year from Sept. 30, 2005 to Sept. 29, 2006. This funding is from the U.S. Office of Population Affairs. For more information, call Pat Harrison at 612-673-3883.

**Lead Outreach Grant** was awarded \$499,797 from Nov. 1, 2005 to Oct. 31, 2007. This funding comes from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD.) See page 3 for more information.

## Staff updates

**Ellie Ulrich Zuehlke**, Steps to a Healthier Minneapolis coordinator, has taken a position at Allina Hospitals and Clinics, where she is the director of Community Benefit Program. Zuehlke worked at MDHFS for almost six years, and helped launch Minneapolis Multicultural Services, an internal City unit to help limited-English speakers navigate City services. Janelle Peralez is serving as interim Steps coordinator, and can be reached at 612-673-3815.

**Angela Robbins**, registered nurse, School-Based Clinics, has graduated from the University of Minnesota with a masters' degree from the nurse practitioner program. Robbins passed her Pediatric Nurse Practitioner certification boards exam in August and now works as a nurse practitioner at the Washburn High School Based Clinic.

**Diana Buckanaga**, housing advocate, has received a Certificate of Appreciation for her 20 years of participation in the City's Business Partners program. This program is a 10-week mentorship, pairing youths participating in the City's Summer Youth Employment program with an experienced adult employee. Buckanaga has been involved since the program's inception in 1985.

**Gretchen Musicant**, MDHFS commissioner, is featured as the author of "Urban Public Health: Promoting Health for City Residents" in the October issue of Minnesota Health Care News.

## New staff

**Janet Mengelkoch**, Community Preparedness specialist, started at MDHFS in August. She will work with community organizations that provide critical services to vulnerable groups – she will assist them with preparedness efforts. She will also work to implement the Special Population Alert and Response Coordination plan, which was recently completed by a variety of City departments. Mengelkoch can be reached at 612-673-3729.

**Emily Wang**, Community Initiatives specialist, started her employment on Oct. 17. Her background includes working for the Minnesota Department of Health in the Office of Minority and Multicultural Health, the Children's Defense Fund and the Minnesota Department of Human Services. She has worked extensively with health and community partners in Minneapolis and across the state to reduce health disparities. She can be reached at 612-673-2144.

**Sharron Berkley**, registered nurse, School-Based Clinics, joined MDHFS this summer, and is working at Patrick Henry High School. She comes from Minneapolis Children's Medical Center, and also has had a great deal of experience volunteering with teens, especially African American teens.

## Volunteer leader honored

The Mayor proclaimed August 24 Vanessa Freeman Day. Freeman is the co-chair of the Minneapolis Public Health Advisory Committee since February 2003, which is her second round of serving on this citizen committee. She works as the Family Preservation Specialist at the African American Family Services in Minneapolis and lives in the Hawthorne neighborhood in North Minneapolis.

## National Spotlight on Best Practices

The Maternity Case Management Excellence (MCME) Project and its pilot site at NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center (formerly Pilot City Health Center) were highlighted in a national publication by CityMatCH. There were 15 case studies included in a four-part series, which focused on best practices for improving the health of urban women. CityMatCH is an organization supporting urban maternal and child health programs across the United States. For a copy of the series, contact Megan Ellingson at 612-673-3817.

## Send in your e-mail address

Healthy City Thriving Families is moving to electronic publication, and we need your e-mail address. To continue receiving this update in your e-mail inbox, please send an e-mail to [health.familysupport@ci.minneapolis.mn.us](mailto:health.familysupport@ci.minneapolis.mn.us) with "subscribe HCTF" as the subject line.