



# HEALTH DEPARTMENT

*Caring today for a healthy tomorrow*

## Health Matters

### It's Time to Think About Your Water

When I teach students about public health, I often ask them to give me their opinions about the greatest achievements of the twentieth century. Predictably, their answers include space exploration, telecommunications, computers, medical technology, and flight. I conclude by sharing my opinionated answer with them: *separating human sewage from drinking water supplies has probably saved more lives than all of their answers combined.*

How often do you wonder if the tap water is safe? Our predecessors certainly did. Typhoid outbreaks decimated our community in the early 1900's. Hundreds of Kent County residents died every year from illnesses acquired from their drinking water. A review of the obituaries from that period indicates far too many people – mostly children – were sent to the grave due to unsafe water.

The reality is, it is something we should all be concerned about. 1.5 million people – again, mostly small children – die every year around the world due to waterborne diseases. Countless others are chronically exposed to chemical pollutants. While these problems continue to devastate other places around the globe – it may leave you wondering: what does this have to do with us in Michigan in the year 2015?

The safety of our drinking water is something we should never take for granted. The events in Flint should cause us to consider our water infrastructure. Switching Flint's water source from the City to Detroit to water from the Flint River apparently caused corrosion of lead-containing components within the supply network. This lead subsequently entered the water and was consumed, causing blood lead levels to spike. The investigation is underway, but it seems likely that opportunities were missed along the way which could have prevented this problem.

We do, of course, have our own water challenges in West Michigan. Local units of government do a fine job of treating and distributing community drinking water with limited resources. Groundwater quantity can be challenging in many areas – especially in dry years. Local officials must maintain their systems and guard against external threats to their supply sources. It was recently announced that the well water near Ewart for Ice Mountain was contaminated by firework shows at the nearby fairgrounds. A highly water soluble ingredient, called Perchlorate, was settling to the ground and percolating into the groundwater.

Thankfully, it has been many years since our last Typhoid death, however, waterborne diseases continue to be an issue. Through September of 2015, the KCHD has received notification of 14 cases of Cryptosporidiosis, 50 cases of Giardiasis, and many cases of other infections which could have had a waterborne cause.

The Kent County Health Department recommends all homes served by a private water well have that well tested annually for coliform bacteria and partial chemistry. Those test kits are available at any of our locations. The test for coliform bacteria costs \$16 and the partial chemistry is \$20. Other local laboratories can also conduct these tests. Please contact the Kent County Health Department Laboratory at (616) 632-7210 for more information.



**Adam London, RS, MPA**  
**Health Officer**

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# KCHD Supervisor Participates in Bill Signing

Chris Buczek, Health Department Program Supervisor, was among a group with Governor Snyder at a ceremonial signing of several bills that update language in Michigan statutes, removing offensive references to children with special health care needs. House Bills 4203, 4204, 4205 and Senate Bills 112, 113 and 114 remove all derogatory references to "crippled children" from state law. The references in law will now be described as "children or youth with special health care needs." One of the bills also modernizes the section of the Public Health Code that recognizes the Children's Special Health Care Services Program (CSHCS). Chris serves as a member of the Michigan CSHCS Citizens Advisory Committee, and has helped hundreds of parents navigate the state health care system.



Chris Buczek ( 2nd from left ) celebrates the signature of a series of bills that removes outdated and offensive language when referring to children with disabilities.

"This language respectfully puts the person before the disability. People with disabilities are – first and foremost – people who have individual abilities, interests and needs, just like everyone else!"

*Chris Buczek*  
*Kent County Health Department*

## KCHD Establishes Material Review Committee

One of the most important tasks humans ever endeavor is communication. As public health practitioners, the delivery of effective, accurate and timely messages has the ability to enhance health and even save lives. If the messages we send are confusing, offensive, or beyond the comprehension of the intended audience, we have failed. The potential consequences are catastrophic. To make sure messaging is understandable and culturally sensitive, the Kent County Health Department has created a Material Review Committee (MRC). The committee will review and approve almost every printed document produced for the public by KCHD staff (flyers, brochures, fact sheets, etc.).

The MRC includes the Deputy Health Officer, the Marketing and Communications Manager and two volunteers from each of KCHD's divisions. They will review publications prior to release based on a checklist the committee has developed. The MRC may then choose to approve or deny the publication, providing feedback to the author. Materials that have an urgent or emergent nature, such as new releases, will not be reviewed by the MRC but will be approved by either the Deputy or Administrative Health Officer.



# Academic Health Department Successes Draws Attention

## KCHD Leaders Asked to Speak at Michigan Premier Public Health Conference

Chelsey K. Chmelar, MPH

The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) launched a new and streamlined internship program in May 2015, recruiting students from colleges and universities far and wide for the Fall 2015 semester. Ten students are currently working with KCHD staff on a variety of projects, ranging from health literacy to emergency preparedness. Due to early successes of this program, the planning committee for the Michigan Premier Public Health Conference solicited a KCHD presentation to discuss and share the why, what, and how of the program with other public health officials throughout the state.



Intern Orientation  
September 1, 2015



KCHD is Leading  
the Next  
Generation of  
Public Health  
Professionals

On October 7, 2015 KCHD Administrative Health Officer, Adam London, Community Wellness Division Director, Joann Hoganson, and Quality and Performance Manager, Chelsey Chmelar, co-presented on efforts to become an Academic Health Department.

Mr. London spoke about the decision to pursue the designation.

Ms. Hoganson discussed how KCHD works with local colleges and universities to offer community health clinical placements for nursing students and how KCHD has become a provider of continuing education units.

Ms. Chmelar shared KCHD's current efforts to go from no process to a standard and streamlined strategy for recruiting, orienting, and preparing students to serve as the next generation of public health professionals.

The presentation was attended by a standing-room only crowd of public health professionals and students. Presenters were engaged with numerous questions and discussion following the session. Many agencies expressed interest in learning more about KCHD's process as they are beginning similar efforts.

It appears that KCHD is leading the way in Michigan in establishing the model of recruiting and orienting a wide array of students, offering robust internship experiences, and providing technical assistance for peers.

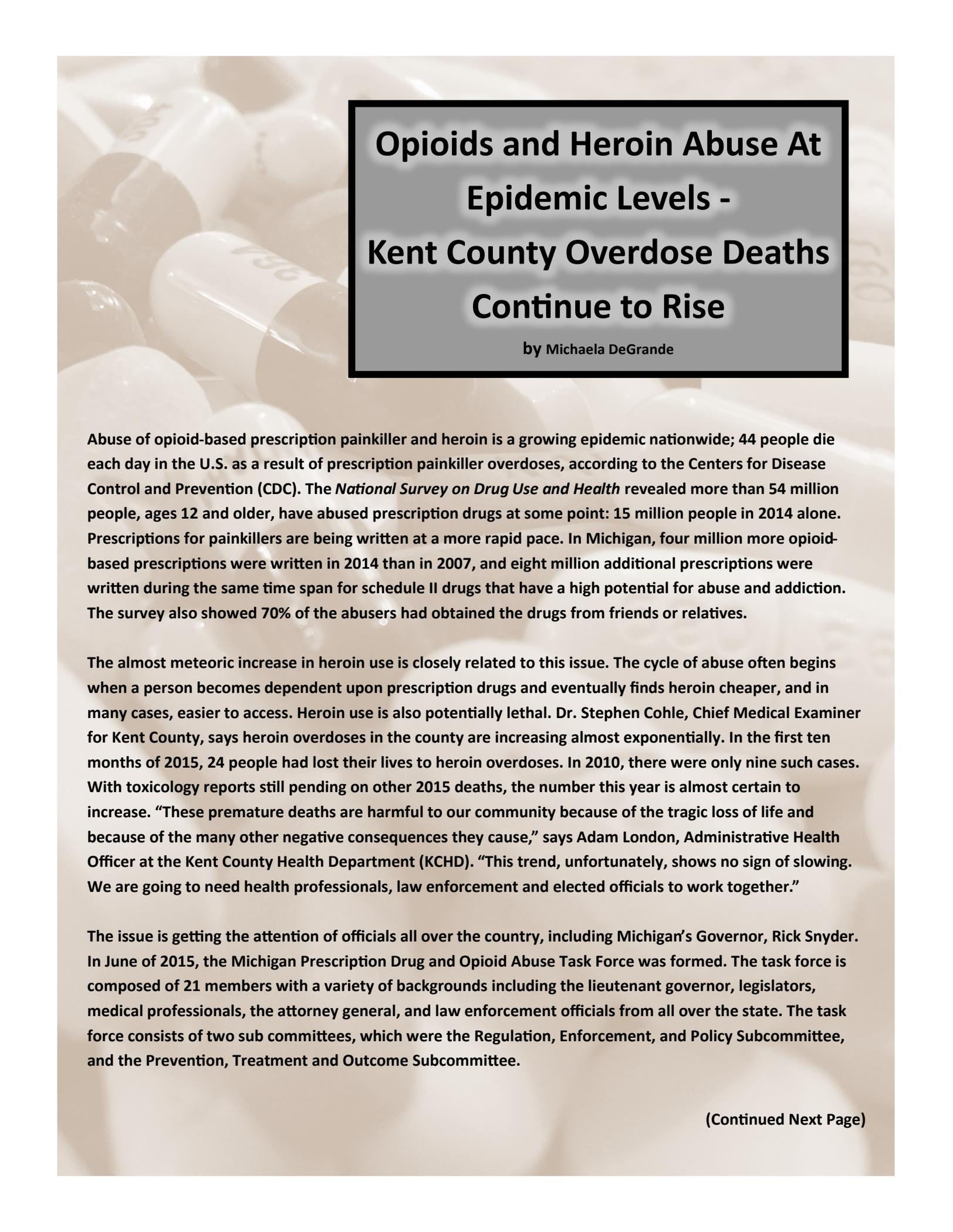
## The Absolute Best in Michigan!

### KCAS Named "Shelter of The Year"



The Michigan Association of Animal Control Officers has named the Kent County Animal Shelter the 2015 Shelter of the Year. KCAS is on it's way to a record year. So far in 2015 almost 800 pets have been placed. "Thanks to each and every-one of you," said Carly Luttmann Program Supervisor. "We really are the best shelter in Michigan and we just keep getting better."





# Opioids and Heroin Abuse At Epidemic Levels - Kent County Overdose Deaths Continue to Rise

by Michaela DeGrande

Abuse of opioid-based prescription painkiller and heroin is a growing epidemic nationwide; 44 people die each day in the U.S. as a result of prescription painkiller overdoses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* revealed more than 54 million people, ages 12 and older, have abused prescription drugs at some point: 15 million people in 2014 alone. Prescriptions for painkillers are being written at a more rapid pace. In Michigan, four million more opioid-based prescriptions were written in 2014 than in 2007, and eight million additional prescriptions were written during the same time span for schedule II drugs that have a high potential for abuse and addiction. The survey also showed 70% of the abusers had obtained the drugs from friends or relatives.

The almost meteoric increase in heroin use is closely related to this issue. The cycle of abuse often begins when a person becomes dependent upon prescription drugs and eventually finds heroin cheaper, and in many cases, easier to access. Heroin use is also potentially lethal. Dr. Stephen Cohle, Chief Medical Examiner for Kent County, says heroin overdoses in the county are increasing almost exponentially. In the first ten months of 2015, 24 people had lost their lives to heroin overdoses. In 2010, there were only nine such cases. With toxicology reports still pending on other 2015 deaths, the number this year is almost certain to increase. "These premature deaths are harmful to our community because of the tragic loss of life and because of the many other negative consequences they cause," says Adam London, Administrative Health Officer at the Kent County Health Department (KCHD). "This trend, unfortunately, shows no sign of slowing. We are going to need health professionals, law enforcement and elected officials to work together."

The issue is getting the attention of officials all over the country, including Michigan's Governor, Rick Snyder. In June of 2015, the Michigan Prescription Drug and Opioid Abuse Task Force was formed. The task force is composed of 21 members with a variety of backgrounds including the lieutenant governor, legislators, medical professionals, the attorney general, and law enforcement officials from all over the state. The task force consists of two sub committees, which were the Regulation, Enforcement, and Policy Subcommittee, and the Prevention, Treatment and Outcome Subcommittee.

(Continued Next Page)

# Opioid Epidemic

continued

The full report of the task force makes 25 primary recommendations in the areas of prevention, treatment, regulation, policy and outcomes, and enforcement.

Highlights of the report include:

- Providing easier access to Naloxone, a drug that reduces the effects of overdose.
- Informing public of the limited legal risk associated with administering Naloxone.
- Updating or replacing the Michigan Automated Prescription System (MAPS).
- Requiring registration and use of MAPS, or replacement system, by those who are prescribing and dispensing prescription drugs.

Task force members hope using an online system would better control doctor or pharmacy “Shopping” or “Surfing”, a practice addicts often employ to obtain drugs. The task force also recommended additional training for medical professionals who are prescribing these pain prescriptions, and producing campaigns to inform the public about the dangers of prescription painkiller abuse.

Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley, who chaired the task force, says, “We clearly have a lot to address but one of the goals of the task force was to present recommendations that we knew were achievable. By working with our partners in the state Legislature and the medical community, I am certain we can achieve the recommendations presented.” More on the task force can be found [here](#).

In Kent County, the Lt. Governor’s sentiments are echoed by Adam London at KCHD. “Responding to this epidemic means first, we must work to prevent people from using heroin and abusing painkillers,” London says. “Next, we have to attack the addiction by ensuring access to treatment. And finally we need to educate the public to the fact that while overdoses can be reversed with Naloxone, proper medical attention afterwards is critical. Accomplishing these objectives will require the support of many in our community.”

## Kent County Heroin Overdose Deaths 2010 - 2015

2015 - 24

as of 10/30/15

2014 - 19

2013 - 18

2012 - 19

2011 - 14

2010 - 9

Source: Kent County Medical Examiner’s Office

# One Year since National Accreditation KCHD Continues to Rack up Achievements

By: Chelsey K. Chmelar, MPH

Just over one year ago the Kent County Health Department (KCHD) became one of the first 60 health departments in the nation to become nationally accredited when the Public Health Accreditation Board's (PHAB) Accreditation Committee conferred accreditation upon the agency on September 17, 2014.



Accredited health departments are required to complete an annual reporting process. It is a two-part, extensive report that asks for agency updates on a number of topics with a special focus on quality improvement, performance management, community health needs assessment and improvement planning. Health departments also report on addressing emerging public health issues, innovative strategies, programs, or services, and other noteworthy achievements.

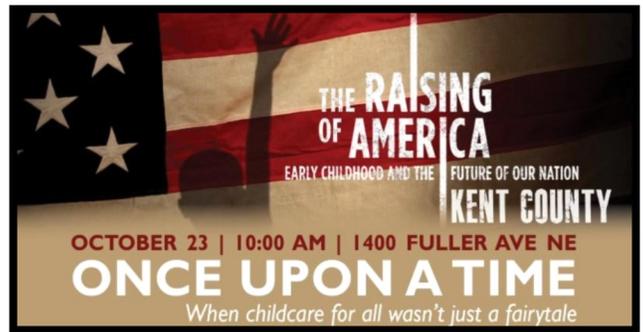
KCHD submitted the report to PHAB's online system on October 13, 2015. The report featured updates on KCHD's strategic planning revision process and the planned expansion of the performance management system to include key performance indicators for all KCHD programs and services. This expansion will build upon data that is currently captured through strategic plan implementation. Additionally, the report discussed quality improvement successes and challenges and featured an in-depth description of a successful quality improvement effort that involved KCHD's Environmental Health Division, specifically the Well and Septic Program.

In the report KCHD staff shared how they have shared their exemplary work with other public health practitioners. For example, receiving Project Public Health Ready (PPHR) designation in January 2015 has resulted in solicitation of several documents and plans from KCHD's emergency preparedness program for inclusion in the National Association of City and County Health Officials' (NACCHO) PPHR Toolbox. One of those plans was the KCHD Workforce Development Plan, which was presented at the NACCHO Annual Conference in July. Since that presentation, the KCHD Emergency Preparedness and Accreditation Coordinators have been asked to submit a "Story from the Field" on this work as a resource for other public health agencies.

Detailed accounts of how KCHD has approached the integration of health equity and social justice into public health practice was another feature of the PHAB annual report, a description of how KCHD approaches public health innovation, and a bulleted list of key accomplishments – including the expansion of dental services at the KCHD South Clinic, implementation of projects through the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Grant from CDC, regionalization of KCHD's Breast and Cervical Cancer Control and Navigation Program to include Muskegon and Ottawa Counties, establishment of the Health Happens Here worksite wellness committee – were just a few of the highlighted areas of success. With so much positive work and numerous achievements in just the past year. It was challenging to keep the story of KCHD's successes within the word limit set by the PHAB annual report template!



## KCHD and Partners Screen Part Two of “The Raising of America”



Raising of America Partners celebrate another successful screening event. September 23rd at GRPS University.

Why, in the richest nation in the world, are our children fairing so poorly? One in four children in the U.S. is now born into poverty. Do our policies actually discourage parents from being able to take care of their children?

The Raising of America is a powerful documentary series from respected producer California Newsreel that attempts to answer these questions and serve as a conversation starter.

The Kent County Health Department has partnered, since April, to provide free screenings and serve as co-facilitators of that conversation. A recent screening drew more than 70 people. Future screenings can be found by clicking [here](#).

## Healthy Kent Infant Health Implementation Team Working to Establish Substance Use Testing During Pregnancy

There is an urgent need to address an apparent rise of newborns who are being diagnosed with opiate withdrawal symptoms in Grand Rapids due to mothers using prescription drugs. The Healthy Kent Infant Health Implementation Team (HKIHIT) is working with area coalitions and committees to create a community standard for universal screening for substance use during pregnancies.

At the group's September 24th meeting, more than 30 partners and stakeholders gathered to discuss the issues surrounding screening, "We have been reaching out to mothers and health care providers for many years," says Barb Hawkins Palmer of the Kent County Health Department. "We provide information that helps educate pregnant women who may be using drugs or alcohol to help them understand the health effects on the fetus and the possible legal ramifications to the mother."

The 2015 release of the Kent County Fetal Infant Mortality Review Program report, "Substance Use/Abuse in Relation to Infant Mortality in Kent County," moves the Drug-Exposed Infant Committee even further with a case to support setting universal community standards for prenatal substance use screening in Kent County.

Palmer says, "We have made a big difference to the most vulnerable residents of Kent County over the years, but this battle is still ongoing."



# KCHD Flu Shot Clinic Doubles as Emergency Response Exercise

## Fictitious Tiger Flu? Not Too Tough to Tame



**“A huge victory.”** That’s what Administrative Health Officer, Adam London had to say about the KCHD Flu Clinic, held on October 15, 2015. Nearly 200 KCHD employees received their annual flu vaccinations as clinic operations ran like clockwork. A “Tiger Flu” scenario was manufactured to conduct a “closed pod” exercise. An emergency message kicked off the exercise on October 14th at 8:31 AM. “A pandemic strain of Tiger Flu has been circulating the globe for the last five months,” the warning began.



“Artist’s concept” of what the media might look like during an actual “Tiger Flu” outbreak



An actual photograph of Adam London, about to receive his 2015 flu shot from Sherrie Sands.

Temperatures of 100 degrees, body aches, fatigue, a striped rash and a severe cough that sounds like a tiger’s growl were the hallmarks of “Tiger Flu.” The vaccine was on its way and the CDC was recommending the local health departments vaccinate first responders. Employees at KCHD played the role of not only first responders, but also as the non-vaccinated public for the exercise.

Staff held a “Hot Wash” after the exercise to discuss multiple successes and what improvements could be made. As this issue of Health Matters was being published, flu activity in the United States as well as Kent County was classified as low. The CDC says more than 109 million doses of this year’s vaccine have been distributed so far in the US. This season’s vaccines have been updated to better match circulating viruses.

KCHD flu information can be found online at [www.StickItToTheFlu.com](http://www.StickItToTheFlu.com).

**Globally, of course, there have been no reports of “Tiger Flu.”**



**HEALTH**  
DEPARTMENT  
*Caring today for a healthy tomorrow*

Kent County Health Department  
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Phone: 616.632.7100

**KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931.**

**The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter.**

**The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids.**

**[www.accessKent.com/Health](http://www.accessKent.com/Health)**



## **Mission Statement**

**To serve, protect and promote a healthy community for all.**