



Concerning Our Health

Greetings from the Putnam County Health Department...

The last few years have been eventful ones. The 2009/2010 H1N1 outbreaks and our frequent “blast fax” bulletins have come and gone, and last year, after an extended transition period, our trusted Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) closed and we opened our new Licensed Home Care Services Agency (LHCSA). Having successfully navigated these challenges together, we are stronger and better positioned to serve you for the future. Our nurses continue to make maternal child health home visits everyday and we continue to be intent upon keeping you informed about the health of our community.

—Sherlita Amler, MD, Commissioner of Health



County nurses focus on public health and prevention

Certified Home Health Agency sold; new LHCSA opens

Late in 2010 the transition was completed. The Putnam County Department of Health’s new Licensed Home Care Services Agency (LHCSA) opened its doors, after its Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) was sold to the Visiting Nurse Services of Westchester (VNSW). Putnam County’s nurses continue to make home visits and focus on true public health and prevention— spearheading efforts for communicable disease prevention and surveillance, maternal child health, and environmental health, particularly lead poisoning prevention. Additionally, they continue to administer a full range of immunization programs. (See related stories on pages 2 and 3.)

It was a bittersweet end to more than 40 years of stellar service to Putnam County residents, coming in the wake of the CHHA’s fourth receipt of the “Home Care Elite” distinction award. This important annual industry designation is awarded for excellent health outcomes compared to state and national benchmarks—The Putnam County CHHA scored in the top 25 percent of agencies nationwide. Its closure is emblematic of healthcare reform changes everywhere—with hospitals outsourcing dialysis centers and even emergency room services, and health insurance reimbursements being trimmed.

The transition was a complicated

and lengthy procedure, but for patients and staff alike it was handled with expertise and tact. All patients requiring skilled nursing and rehabilitation services typically following acute hospitalization, were cared for seamlessly by their nurses until discharge, or until referral was complete to the newly formed Visiting Nurse Services of Putnam (VNSP). All

CHHA nurses were offered new positions with VNSP, now under the management of Loretta Molinari, RN, MS, former Associate Commissioner of Health for Putnam County.

The VNSP, complete with the previous nursing staff from the Putnam County CHHA, is located at 979C Route 22, Brewster, NY 10509. The telephone is 845-278-2550.

Babies and moms start out right ...thanks to MCH nurses

Getting babies and moms off to a healthy start is the number-one priority of the Maternal Child Health program at the Putnam County Department of Health. Specially trained MCH nurses, with expertise in labor and delivery, post-partum care, neonates, pediatrics and special need populations, visit mothers and their babies at home in the immediate post-partum and newborn period. With clients’ unique needs in mind, they offer lactation support and education, routine newborn and post-partum care, including depression screenings, and ensure care continuity from hospital, or other setting, to home.

Skilled nursing care may include monitoring and case management for mothers requiring follow-up for C-section wound care and pre-eclampsia, as well as vital sign checks, and for children with prematurity, CHD, BPD, RDS or other chronic medical conditions.

Health Department MCH nurses also monitor children

vulnerable to developmental delays through the ICHAP/ Child Find program and at-risk populations through the perinatal Hepatitis B and newborn screening programs.

Serving an average of 300 clients a year in their homes, MCH nurses also provide outreach programs to countless others. The PCDOH New Moms’ Group meets weekly at the Mahopac Library on Fridays, from 1 to 3 pm, and at the Brewster Library on Thursdays from 10 am to 12 pm, with Tamara Casablanca, a bilingual breastfeeding advisor. By partnering with other organizations such as the March of Dimes and the Lower Hudson Valley Perinatal Network, a wide variety of healthcare

services are also provided to Putnam County families in need of support and education.

Referrals to the MCH program come from pediatricians, OB/GYNs, local and regional hospitals, WIC, and in some instances new mothers themselves.

For referrals to the MCH nursing program

Rebecca Wittenberg, RN, BSN
Kathy Percacciolo, RN, BSN
Diane Liscia, RN, MSN
Jean Ralston, RN, MSN

845-808-1335 phone
845-808-1336 fax

Overall TB cases decrease, but occurrences continue

Tuberculosis (TB) is a nationally mandated, reportable disease and public health organizations have been trying to eradicate it, but the task is proving more difficult than previously thought. In Putnam County, like New York City and the state in general, sporadic cases continue to arise, primarily in high-risk populations. Racial/ethnic minorities are affected disproportionately, putting Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, Eastern Europeans and Russians at greater risk. Overall national incidence rates are on the decline. In fact, 2009 statistics showed an 11.4 percent decrease (from 4.2 to 3.8 per 100,000), earning the greatest single-year decrease recorded and the lowest rate since national TB surveillance began in 1953, according to the CDC. Case counts and rates decreased across most populations, including racial/ethnic minorities and foreign-born residents.

The challenge is that TB can lie dormant for decades and according to the World Health Organization one-third of the world's population, or two billion people, carry the bacteria. Of those with latent TB which is not contagious, 10 percent typically will convert to active disease in their lifetime.

Putnam County providers are encouraged to consider TB in their differential diagnosis.

Conditions increasing conversion to active TB

- ▶ HIV or other immune deficiency
- ▶ Substance abuse
- ▶ Recent infection
- ▶ Chest radiograph findings suggesting previous TB
- ▶ Diabetes mellitus
- ▶ Silicosis
- ▶ Prolonged corticosteroid therapy, or other immunosuppressive treatment
- ▶ Cancer of the head or neck
- ▶ Hematologic and reticuloendothelial disease
- ▶ End-stage renal disease
- ▶ Intestinal bypass or gastrectomy
- ▶ Chronic malabsorption syndrome
- ▶ Low body weight (=>10 percent below ideal)

Reporting TB

Alice DuBon, RN, MS, FNP
Pat Gormley, RN

845-808-1335, x43113 phone
845-808-1336 fax

Free Tdap vaccine available to “cocoon infants”

Before infants receive their three doses of DTaP by six months of age they are at risk of contracting pertussis, a serious childhood illness that is on the rise according to the CDC. Over 50,000 cases were reported in 2004 and 2005 in the U.S., the largest number since the 1950s. Adults with pertussis may experience only mild symptoms and consequently are unaware of the potential to pass it on to children with whom they have contact.

To protect these vulnerable infants, “cocoon vaccination” takes advantage of herd immunity. By administering Tdap booster vaccines to parents and caregivers, the number of potential carriers who may expose infants can be reduced significantly. This approach, recommended by the CDC since 2006, is becoming more routine in healthcare organizations and the Putnam County Department of Health is spearheading efforts to make it more commonplace in the County. Partnering with Putnam Hospital Center, the PCDOH provides free Tdap vaccines to pediatricians and

OB/GYNs for their patients, through funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Health Department outreach to staff in daycare facilities and family daycare homes has also begun by educating providers about the cocoon strategy and availability of free administration of Tdap boosters.

Flu season 2010/2011 recap

More than 4,400 influenza vaccines were administered to Putnam County residents, ages 6 months and up, during the 2010/11 season, quieter than the 2009/10 pandemic season.

A new school-based influenza program was launched and more than 1,200 students and employees were immunized quickly, safely and free of charge at the Mahopac and Carmel Central School Districts.

The highly successful “Vote and Vax” event on Election Day resulted in the administration of 1,282 doses of flu vaccine in 5 hours. This large scale undertaking also served as an emergency

(continued on back cover)

NYSIIS participation jumps to more than 80 percent

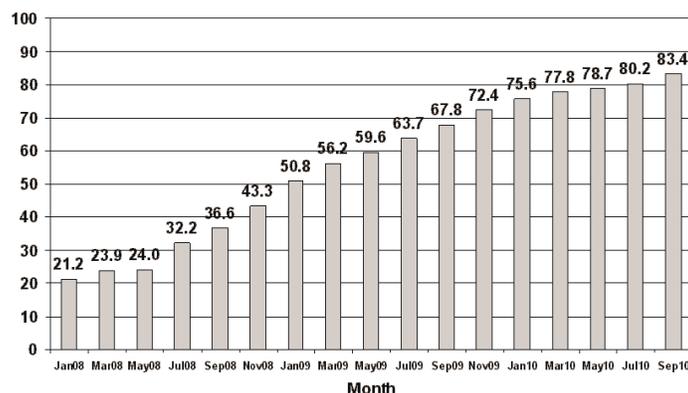
Provider participation in the NYS Immunization Information System (NYSIIS) has risen sharply in the last 5 years. Last September, 80.1 percent of NYS children (<6 years of age), had two or more immunizations entered, compared to 21.2 percent in January 2008.

The mandated system will end vaccine duplication, cut costs and streamline physician record-keeping.

Other benefits include: consolidated, up-to-date records; automated, patient-specific reminders for recommended vaccines and doses, complete with mailing labels; easy record printouts for daycares, schools, camps and colleges; electronic data transfer from providers' electronic medical records or clinical billing systems to NYIIS; tracking of vaccine

Percent of Children Less Than 6 Years of Age with Two or More Imms in NYSIIS*

New York State (Outside of New York City)



inventory, practice coverage levels and lot numbers in case of recall.

For further information:
PCDOH Immunization Program
845-808-1332 or
nysiis@health.state.ny.us
518-473-2839

Warm weather brings increased risks of both tick-borne illnesses and rabies

After the heavy snowfall this winter, Putnam County residents are eager to get outside again. As the new summer tick season begins, surveillance numbers from last year are in, showing tick-borne illnesses continue to be a concern in Putnam County. Here is the four-year stat sheet on the county's tick-borne diseases:

	2010	'09	'08	'07
Lyme disease*	171	132	202	140
Babesiosis	8	3	6	1
Ehrlichiosis				
<i>Anaplasma phagocytophila</i>	15	27	19	19
<i>E. chafeensis</i>	2	7	1	7
Rocky Mountain spotted fever	1	0	0	0
Encephalitis, Powassan virus	1	1	0	1

*Prior to the 2009 season, the case definition for Lyme disease was less strictly defined. Additionally, case numbers are based on a NYSDOH calculation that extrapolates total number from PCDOH investigation of 20 percent of lab reports.

Powassan (POW) encephalitis, another tick-borne illness, has made an appearance in Putnam County. Named after the town in Ontario, Canada, where it was first described in 1958, the POW virus can cause potentially deadly illness, with an approximate 10 to 15 percent fatality rate. The incubation period ranges from 8 to 34 days, but often the exact date of exposure is not known. Prodrome may include headache, sore throat, drowsiness, lethargy, disorientation and some level of paralysis. Encephalitis typically follows, with vomiting, respiratory distress, possible convulsions and prolonged, sustained fever. In at least 50 percent of survivors, long-term, severe problems occur including hemiplegia, recurrent severe headaches, wasting and memory problems. The good news is that documented cases of Powassan encephalitis are still quite rare, although suspected to be more common than previously thought. Putnam County holds the dubious distinction of having one of the six confirmed cases diagnosed in the U.S. last year—that coming on the heels of two previous cases in 2007 and 2009. Despite being relatively rare, there are laboratory tests beyond an encephalitis panel that test specifically for Powassan encephalitis. Please check with your reference laboratory to see if they have the capability to run the test. **If you suspect encephalitis, collect a CSF specimen as soon as possible. Freeze and ship overnight on dry ice to the reference lab or the virology lab at the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center. The Wadsworth lab accepts CSF specimens on**

a case-by-base basis, so please contact the PCDOH for assistance with this process.

“Powassan” should be specified on all lab orders, regardless of which lab is used, to ensure the appropriate test is performed.

Reporting cases of communicable disease

Rachel Gressel, RN, MS
Joanne Ryan, RN

845-808-1335, press “O”
845-808-1336 fax

Patients who present with an animal bite or suspected bat exposure should be reported immediately to the Health Department’s Environmental Division, which is required by NYS public health law to promptly investigate all cases of human and domestic animal exposures to known or suspect rabid animals. Those residents requiring rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (RPEP) are then pre-authorized and referred to the emergency room, usually at Putnam Hospital Center, where the first dose of human rabies immune globulin (HRIG) and rabies vaccine are administered. With pre-authorization, typically the PCDOH will provide the medications and pay for the cost of treatment if a patient’s insurance does not provide coverage. Without pre-authorization, patients are responsible for obtaining the medications and paying the treatment costs, which are significant. HRIG is an expensive biologic made from human donor serum and ranges several thousand dollars per treatment.

Complete RPEP consists of HRIG given on day 0 and a dose of rabies vaccine given on days 0, 3, 7, and 14. PCDOH nurses provide the medications for the three follow-up injections (days 3, 7, and 14), administered by the patient’s referring physician. Together they ensure the series is completed.

The elimination of the day-28 dose has simplified treatment considerably for most patients. For immunosuppressed patients, a fifth dose on day 28 is still recommended.

Reporting rabies to the Environmental Division

Marianne Burdick, MPH
Michael Luke

845-808-1390 phone
845-278-7921 fax

For your patients:

New travel vaccine clinic opens

Patients traveling overseas often face particular health concerns, depending on their destination. A new travel vaccine clinic, held twice each month at the Putnam County Department of Health, offers services for those who need immunizations for travel. Vaccines for rabies, yellow fever and typhoid are all available along with the routine immunizations that the Health Department has always offered. Routine immunizations are often necessary for protection from diseases such as polio that rarely occur in the U.S. anymore, but are still commonplace overseas.

Prescriptions from practitioners are required for all people receiving rabies, yellow fever and typhoid vaccines and for anyone over the age of 18 years who needs a polio vaccine. Oral typhoid vaccine, which has a longer duration of protection than the injectable version, also requires a prescription and can be obtained at a pharmacy.

The PCDOH additionally offers guidance regarding malaria prophylaxis.

For travel and routine immunizations

Alice DuBon, RN, MS, FNP

845-808-1332 phone
845-808-1335, x43240 phone
845-808-1336 fax

A practitioner’s prescription must be written and the medication obtained at a pharmacy. Educational materials on avoiding insect and arthropod-borne diseases and travelers’ diarrhea are also provided by the Health Department.

Patients can call the Health Department directly to schedule an appointment and should have their detailed itinerary available when phoning. Patients are charged a \$20 clinic fee, plus the cost of each vaccine and its administration.

For further information on destination-specific vaccines: <http://www.nc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list.aspx>

The PCDOH continues to offer routine ACIP-recommended vaccinations for children ages 1 month to 19 years, and for adults as well.



Putnam County Health Department
 1 Geneva Road
 Brewster, New York 10509
 Phone: (845) 808-1390
 Fax: (845) 278-7921

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Putnam County Administration

Paul J. Eldridge, County Executive
 Sherlita Amler, MD, Commissioner of Health
 Robert Morris, PE, Director, Environmental Health

Editorial Board

Susan Hoffner, Health Educator
 Barbara Ilardi, MPA, CDN, Supervising Public Health Educator
 Kathy Percacciolo, RN, BSN, Supervising Public Health Nurse

Layout and design

Susan Hoffner, Health Educator

Lead poisoning remains concern for NYS children

Each year 4,000 children in NYS are diagnosed with high lead levels that put them at risk of toxicity that can impact their growth, behavior and ability to learn, and potentially cause irreversible brain damage. As part of routine care, *all children should undergo blood tests to check for lead levels at age one, and again at age two, as required by NYS Public Health Law.* If caught early, continued exposure can be avoided, medical and nutritional steps taken, and serious problems possibly averted.

A leading cause of exposure comes from home renovations in pre-1978 struc-

- Follow-up testing (<18 years of age)** for those who fit any of the following criteria:
- ▶ Reside in housing built before 1978, with deteriorating lead-based paint
 - ▶ Adoption from countries with few lead restrictions (i.e., China, etc.)
 - ▶ Access to imported foods, toys, cosmetics, or herbal medicines
 - ▶ Parents with occupations or hobbies exposing them to lead

For testing or info on Lead Poisoning

Joanne Ryan, RN
 845-808-1335, x43241 phone
 845-808-1336 fax

Rick Carano
 Environmental Health
 845-808-1390, x43216 phone
 845-278-7921 fax

tures, which may contain lead-based paint. Approximately 10,684 homes in Putnam County, or 30.5%, fall within this category. Unborn children are also at risk because lead passes through the placenta to the fetus. So risk assessment and blood lead testing is required for all women in their first trimester.

The Environmental Health and Nursing staff work closely to inspect the homes of children identified with elevated blood lead levels—to find and eliminate the source, and monitor the children until the levels return to acceptable standards.

Physicians’ assistance helps patients quite smoking

Physician involvement in patients’ smoking cessation efforts makes a big difference. Studies show that just 7% of smokers who quit on their own will achieve long term abstinence—compared to 30% for those with physician assistance. Staff members from POW’R (Putnam, Orange, Westchester and Rockland) Tobacco Cessation Center provide free technical assistance, training, literature, and consultation to clinicians and healthcare organizations to support their efforts with tobacco education and cessation services.

For further information, contact:
 Didi Raxworthy, Director
 POW’R Tobacco Cessation Center
 914 347-2094 X44
 Email: draxworthy@alany.org
 Or visit: www.powrcessationcenter.org

Flu season 2010/2011 recap (continued from page 2)

preparedness drill, testing Point of Dispensing (POD) procedures that would be utilized in the event of a public health crisis that necessitated mass vaccination.

Other large clinics were held around the county, including four at the Carmel and Garrison firehouses where more than 1,000 residents received their annual influenza vaccine.