



Concerning Our Health

Greetings from the Putnam County Department of Health

It is summer and in Putnam County that means ticks and the illnesses they can bring. Tick-borne diseases continue to rise and we need your help in reporting them, particularly the Lyme disease cases you diagnose without lab work. Of course, we must all continue to encourage patients to protect themselves.

Other stories in this issue include our work with community partners to reduce tobacco related illness and death, and our new “special event” initiatives to promote healthy behaviors.

Last, but certainly not least, I am happy to welcome two new members to our Board of Health. The work the board does in supporting our department is invaluable to me and my staff.

—Allen Beals, MD, JD, Commissioner of Health



Tick-borne Illnesses Appearing Earlier in Season

Last winter’s weather is likely to bring a more active tick season this summer.

Heavy snowfall acts like insulation, protecting sleeping ticks that lay close to the ground. According to research from the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in Dutchess County, these pests are arriving earlier each spring, and so far this year, health department surveillance supports this.

Lyme disease is still the most common tick-borne illness, but not the only one. The total case numbers of babesiosis, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis and powassan virus rose approximately

50 percent from 2010 to 2014.

Lyme continues to be under-reported—especially cases diagnosed by the telltale erythema migrans (EM) rash. Since there is no need to order confirmatory blood work, physicians should report these directly to the health department. **Weekly reporting can be called in to 808-1390, extension 43129 or 43241 at the health department or using the “line list” form previously faxed to physician offices.**

While Lyme disease, along with babesiosis, anaplasmosis and ehrlichiosis, are most common,

Powassan virus, or more specifically Powassan virus lineage II known as Deer Tick Virus (DTV), is also on the rise.

Putnam’s tick population has the highest

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For additional info or to receive a LINE LIST:

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x43129
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845-808-1390
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Two New Members Join Board of Health

Theresa A. Burdick, DNP, and Raymond E. Phillips, MD, have joined the Putnam County Board of Health (BOH). Dr. Burdick filled the position left vacant by Carol Weber, RN, when she retired last fall after more than 22 years of service, and Dr. Phillips is taking the position of Michael Gaesser, MD, who



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Clinical symptoms of Powassan

Incubation period: 1-4 weeks

Signs/symptoms can include:

- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Weakness
- ▶ Can progress to neurologic involvement
- ▶ Meningitis/encephalitis
- ▶ Altered mental status
- ▶ Seizures or other movement disorders
- ▶ Aphasia

Changing behaviors and social norms to improve health

Sedentary, stress-filled lives; little time to exercise or enjoy home-cooked meals; easily available calorie-dense, fast food—these facts of life prompt all sorts of unhealthy behaviors today. The result is a rising prevalence of chronic diseases, such as diabetes and obesity, heart disease, and some types of cancer, in Putnam and around the country.

Last year the PCDOH organized a pair of special events to bring attention to and alter this unhealthy landscape here in Putnam County, if only a bit.

The Second Annual Eat Smart

Restaurant Week will kick off for two weeks from September 27 through October 11.

The premise is to demonstrate that delicious and healthy can go hand in hand. Last year 35 Putnam eateries joined the



effort. Dine-in restaurants, delicatessens, one “fast-food” chain and a few cafeteria-style food establishments worked closely with health department nutritionists to fine tune selected menu items to ensure they were both delicious and healthy. This year even more eateries are expected to participate.

The Second Annual Run 4 Your

Life is scheduled for September 27. Road races and walks are not new, but the PCDOH event is no ordinary road race. It is envisioned as a family fun day, with a focus on physical activity. Everyone knows the importance of exercise for good health, but the challenge is finding a way to incorporate it into your life, and there is no better way than to make it a family or group



social activity.

A third special event the PCDOH is organizing takes aim at social norms involving breastfeeding. For the second year, the county will participate in the global effort called the

“**Big latch on**,” scheduled for Friday, July 31. Putnam

breastfeeding moms will gather at the Carmel Fire Department and at 10:30 a.m., join thousands of others around the world in an attempt to break the record of most moms breastfeeding at once, 14,536 set in 2013. All breastfeeding moms are invited and there will be activities for young children of all ages.

For more information on all three events, call 808-1390, or visit www.putnamcountyny.com/health



Two New Board of Health Members, *continued from page 1.*

recently moved from the county.

Dr. Burdick, who has a doctorate in nursing practice from Sacred Heart University, is coordinator of medical services and a family nurse practitioner at Hudson Valley Community Services in Brewster, where she has worked since 1996. She previously worked as a registered nurse in oncology at Westchester Medical Center and at Danbury Hospital, and as director of program operations at New Horizons Resources in Pleasant Valley, New York.

Dr. Phillips is an at-

tending physician in the department of medicine at Westchester Medical Center, and clinical associate professor at New York Medical College, where he is involved in teaching physical diagnosis to resident physicians specializing in internal medicine. He also holds the title of honorary professor of medicine at Women’s Medical College and Hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and has traveled extensively overseas. In 1983 he established a not-for-profit medical exchange organization, to mentor medical students,

and provide clinical education and tuberculosis control, most recently in Honduras, Ecuador, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

The search to fill the two vacancies began last November and ended in April with the final legislative approval of Dr. Phillips, who will complete the term of Dr. Gaesser, ending in December 2016. Dr. Burdick was approved in February and her appointment is through December 2021.

The BOH serves in an advisory capacity to the Health Commissioner Allen Beals, MD, JD, who has led

the health department since 2012. The by-laws dictate that at least one legislator and three physicians are members of the board. The remaining four are laypersons; all must be Putnam County residents.

Other BOH members include Daniel C. Doyle, DMD, President; Arthur McCormick, DVM, Vice President; Barbara Scuccimarra, Putnam County Legislature; Ginny Nacerino, Alternate Putnam County Legislature; Joseph Avanzato, MD, Secretary, and Michael Nesheiwat, MD.

Providers' Counseling: a powerful tool in smoking cessation

Getting patients to quit smoking is not easy, but provider advice is one of the biggest motivators for patients. In fact, just 3 to 10 minutes of counseling increases quit rates 60 percent. Research has also found that combining counseling with medication can increase long-term quit rates by up to 20 to 30 percent, and Medicare, Medicaid and often commercial insurances will reimburse medical providers, and now dental practitioners, for both.

Repeated cessation interventions by clinicians—at every visit—can make a difference because tobacco dependence usually requires multiple quit attempts before long-term abstinence is achievable. Ask-Advise-Connect (or Refer) is a newer strategy, a streamlined version of the evidenced-based, original “5As” (ask, advise, assess, assist, and arrange).

Physicians and other providers can automatically connect patients with the New York State Smokers' Quitline (NYSSQL) through an electronic medical record or by faxing their name and contact information to the Quitline. Counselors from the Smokers' Quitline contact the smoker directly to facilitate and reinforce the last three steps. Providers can receive follow-up progress reports from the NYSSQL.

Hospital-based programs have a

potential head start in this process since in-patients are not permitted to smoke during their stay. Putnam Hospital Center recently launched the Opt-to-Quit program for patients who wish to kick the habit for good. Working with the NYSSQL, the Center for a Tobacco-Free Hudson Valley and the Putnam County Department of Health, Putnam Hospital and other practice-based programs are helping to tackle one of the chronic disease prevention priorities of the county's Community Health Improvement Plan, known simply as the “CHIP,” to promote smoking cessation among adults. CHIP efforts are also championed by POW'R Against Tobacco, the Putnam-Orange-Westchester-Rockland advocacy group that takes a public policy approach to ending tobacco use. (See story on page 4.)

Providers can access online resources at www.NYsmokefree.com which has a section for health providers and partners with information about reimbursements and coding, practice transformation and patient referrals.

The Center for a Tobacco-Free Hudson Valley for Putnam works with primary care providers and health care organizations to implement systems to screen patients for tobacco use and prompt providers to offer advice and assistance to quit. Free services for providers include on-site staff training

(individual or group) on topics such as effective motivational counseling techniques, how to talk to patients about quitting, how to improve office practices to promote patient cessation success and pharmacotherapy options. Free patient education materials on topics related to smoking cessation are

also available through the Center for a Tobacco-Free Hudson Valley.

For further information, contact: Didi Raxworthy, Director, Center for a Tobacco-Free Hudson Valley
draxworthy@lungne.org
 914-407-2214

There's a code for that...

Smoking and tobacco use cessation counseling visits are reimbursable through Medicare and Medicaid as well as commercial insurances:

99406 = basic CPT code for intermediate counseling > 3 minutes up to 10 minutes

99407 = basic CPT code for more intensive counseling, >10 minutes

Tick-borne illnesses appearing earlier, *continued from page 1.*

infection rate in the lower Hudson Valley, see Table 1 below.

Documented Powassan cases,

while still quite rare, are on the rise and Putnam's current case count is 7, the highest in New York State.

Table 1 Infection rates of questing adult *I. scapularis*, collected in 7 Lower Hudson Valley Counties, NY 2009-2012

County	No. ticks (Total Pools)	No. DTV isolates	Infection rate (95% CI) ^a
	Male/Female	Male/Female	
Dutchess	421/462 (392)	5/4	1.05 (0.52-1.91)
Putnam	302/371 (406)	16/11	3.84 (2.60-5.46)
Westchester	118/84 (21)	0/5	2.73 (1.03-6.04)
Rockland	67/71 (15)	0/2	1.45 (0.27-4.66)
Orange	74/73 (16)	0/0	0.0 (0.00-2.30)
Ulster	46/37 (9)	0/0	0.0 (0.00-3.77)
Sullivan	50/55 (11)	0/0	0.0 (0.00-3.01)

^a Infection rate expressed as Maximum Likelihood Estimate/100 ticks. The ranges in parentheses are the 95% confidence intervals representing upper and lower limits

Source: Dupuis et al. *Parasites & Vectors* 2013, 6:185 Online at <http://parasitesandvectors.com/content/6/1/185>

The 5 As:

Ask each patient at every visit about their tobacco use.

Advise patient to quit using tobacco in a clear, strong, personalized manner. Discuss connections between tobacco use and any current medical problems. Remind the patient that any tobacco use is bad for their health.

Assess patient willingness to try quit attempt.

Assist in the patient's quit attempt. Prescribe medications and refer to the NYS Quitline, which offers 2 free weeks of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) and phone counseling.

Arrange further follow up. If the patient is willing to make a quit attempt, the physician can schedule follow up contact in person or by telephone with his or her own office, or alternatively, the physician can rely on the Quitline for follow up phone counseling.



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Putnam just says “no” to electronic cigarettes

In May the Putnam County Legislature unanimously voted to pass a code revision to include electronic cigarettes in the Clean Indoor Air Act, making it illegal to use e-cigarettes anywhere smoking is prohibited.

Health Commissioner Allen Beals, MD, spoke with the legislators prior to the vote to illuminate the dangers of e-cigarettes and the dramatic increases in use among high school students. The health department has worked closely with Maureen Kenney, Director of POW’R Against Tobacco since the Clean Indoor Air act was passed in New York State ten years ago. POW’R which stands for Putnam, Orange, Westchester and Rockland counties, is the local group which advocates for public policy changes to end tobacco use.

Dr. Beals also took the opportunity to speak directly to the public about this issues in his monthly column in *The Putnam County Courier* (at right), published on May 14.

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PERSPECTIVE

E-Cigarettes & Youth, Marriage Headed for Disaster

Alarm bells have been going off with the recent report from Centers for Disease Control (CDC) about youth tobacco use. While traditional cigarette usage is down almost 42 percent among high school students from 2011

The result is that overall tobacco use has inched slightly up to 24.6 percent. The increase in hookah smoking is particularly disturbing because it involves inhaling burned tobacco via a water pipe and carries many of the identical health risks of cigarette smoking. An hour-long hookah session includes 200 puffs compared to a 20-puff cigarette and the amount of smoke inhaled is more than 100 fold. This is definitely not a safe substitute for cigarette smoking.

E-cigarettes have been considered a “healthier” option because there is no smoke. The attractive flavors are directly appealing to the young and e-cig initiation very often leads to smoking eventually. Brain chemistry changes make nicotine addiction particularly hard to beat and those who are currently struggling with this have my total sympathy. That’s why prevention in the first place is the best approach. Ask adult smokers and you find the vast majority started as teenagers.

E-cigarettes are now big business. Sales are expected to top \$10 billion by 2017. With flavors such as Cherry Crush, Sweet Tarts and Watermelon Splash it is no secret who these companies are targeting. Tobacco companies are not allowed to use these flavor temptations to market tobacco cigarettes anymore, but it seems they have found a sinister approach to thwart the law and trap young people into a life of addiction.

That is why I am happy to report that on May 5 the Putnam County Legislature unanimously passed a code revision to include electronic cigarettes in our Clean Indoor Air act, making it illegal to use e-cigs anywhere smoking is prohibited. Raising the minimum age to purchase cigarettes to 21 years continues to be discussed.



Allen Beals is the Commissioner of Health for the Putnam County Department of Health.

**ALLEN BEALS,
M.D.**

to 2014, electronic cigarette use dramatically increased from 1.5 percent to 13.4 percent. Hookah use also rose significantly—more than doubling from 4.1 percent to 9.4 percent.

E-cigs and hookah are now the top two tobacco products used by high school students today and these increases more than cancel out the drop in cigarette smoking.