



# NJ Communi- CABLE

Autumn 2021 Quarterly Newsletter

## Communicable Disease Service Mission Statement

Our mission is to prevent communicable disease among all citizens of New Jersey, and to promote the knowledge and use of healthy lifestyles to maximize the health and well-being of New Jerseyans.

We will accomplish our mission through our leadership, collaborative partnerships, and advocacy for communicable disease surveillance, research, education, treatment, prevention and control.

Phil Murphy, Governor

Sheila Oliver, Lt. Governor

Judith M. Persichilli, RN, BSN, MA  
Commissioner

### COMMUNICABLE DISEASE SERVICE

Christina Tan, MD, MPH  
State Epidemiologist/  
Assistant Commissioner

Gary Ludwig, MS, Director

Suzanne Miro, MPH, MCHES  
Editor, Research Scientist

## From the Desk of the Medical Director...

On January 9, 2020 as the world gradually awoke from a post-holiday slumber, attention was focused on the Middle East amid concerns that tit-for-tat attacks between the US and Iran could escalate into a larger confrontation. National headlines continued to be dominated by President Trump, and what little interest most New Jerseyans were paying to public health focused on the raging flu season. Unnoticed outside of the public health community, was a New Jersey Department of Health message delivered via the Local Information Network Communication System to all healthcare providers, infection preventionists, and local health departments. Titled “Outbreak of Pneumonia of Unknown Etiology (PUE) in Wuhan, China CDC Health Advisory,” this message advised of a cluster of pneumonia of unknown etiology with possible epidemiologic links to a large wholesale fish and live animal market in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China.

Two weeks later the first case of this new disease was diagnosed in Washington State. New Jersey was to join a growing list of states when on March 4, 2020, a man in his 30s with no known travel or exposure history was confirmed positive. Over the



Ed Lifshitz, MD, Medical Director  
Communicable Disease Service

following months, COVID-19 (as this disease was to become known) wreaked havoc across our densely populated cosmopolitan state, with 10% of our residents confirmed to have been infected (surely an underestimate), 1% hospitalized, and almost 24,000 confirmed dead.

Even before the pandemic hit, outbreaks reported to NJDOH increased nearly every year culminating in 540 outbreaks in 2019, a 40% increase over the preceding decade. Over this same

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## Project Firstline – Bringing Infection Control Front and Center!

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted gaps in infection control knowledge and practice in healthcare settings nationwide. In response, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) launched [Project Firstline](#) (PFL), a comprehensive infection control program designed to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in U.S. healthcare settings by equipping healthcare workers with the confidence and skills to

apply infection prevention and control (IPC) principles to protect their patients, families, communities, and themselves. The New Jersey Department of Health Communicable Disease Service (CDS) is partnering with CDC’s PFL along with 64 state, territorial, and local health departments as well as national healthcare, public health, and academic partners funded through CDC’s Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity cooperative agreement.

As a part of this collaborative, the CDS PFL team aims to accomplish the following goals:

- Offer multi-platform training events covering a variety of IPC topics and include a diverse representation of frontline healthcare workers.
- Expand reach to include students/non-clinical support staff



and place added focus on long-term and acute care facilities.

- Engage in and support the increase of promotional activities for PFL.

In April, staff disseminated a learning needs assessment (LNA) to aid in the development and delivery of trainings for healthcare workers in all settings. The map provided illustrates some of our preliminary data at the county level. Our LNA is still open and we want to hear from you! To access our online survey, scan the QR provided. Furthermore, CDS PFL staff have met and presented to 25 healthcare and public health organizations statewide as potential partners in the promotion and delivery of our trainings.

Currently, we are offering training and

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### The NJDOH Communicable Disease Service includes:

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Vaccine Preventable Disease Program (VPDP): 609-826-4860

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[www.nj.gov/health/cd](http://www.nj.gov/health/cd)

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## Teen Vaccine Awareness

As the school year is kicking off, many adolescents are returning to their healthcare providers for physicals and to receive the recommended immunizations. At 11-12 years of age, adolescents are recommended to receive the first dose of MenACWY, the first dose of the HPV vaccine series, and one dose of Tdap. Fall also signals the beginning of the flu season, everyone six months of age and older is recommended to receive the flu vaccine. There may also be other recommended vaccines based on risk-factors or travel. For more information on the immunization schedule, please view the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



(CDC) [Recommended Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule for ages 18 years or younger, 2021.](#)

National Immunization Survey-Teen (NIS-Teen) data from 2019 indicated that vaccination coverage rates for human papillomavirus (HPV) and influenza continue to lag behind rates for tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis (Tdap) and first dose MenACWY vaccines (see graph above). Ensuring a strong provider recommendation is the best predictor of patient vaccination.

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Get more information at <http://nj.gov/health/cd/handwashing.shtml>.

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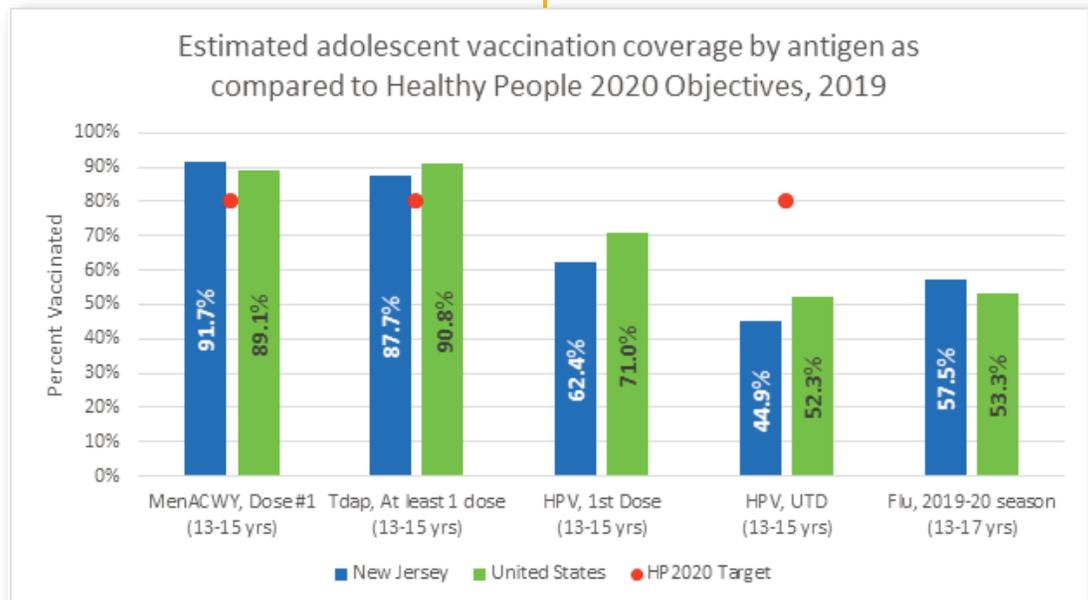
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Data available via: **FluVaxView:** [www.cdc.gov/flu/fluvoxview/interactive.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluvoxview/interactive.htm) and **TeenVaxView:** [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/teenvaxview/data-reports/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/teenvaxview/data-reports/index.html)



## 20 Years Later: The American Anthrax Story from a Health Educator's Perspective

by Suzanne Miro, MPH, MCHES

**T**o most people, October 9th is merely another date, but it likely has more significance for those working in public health. Forever etched in my memory, in 2001 it fell on a Tuesday and marked the day that two anthrax-laced letters were processed in a Hamilton, NJ mail facility bringing the state into national headlines as the epicenter of the first anthrax attack on US soil. This

coincidentally was also my first day on the job as a health educator at the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH). Still reeling from the aftermath of the terror attacks on the World Trade Center, New Jersey was in an already shaky state and the anthrax situation sent public health and law enforcement agencies into overdrive.

At that time, I had the privilege of working directly with the postal employees who were exposed to anthrax spores during the course of their work at the mail facility. Through this experience, there were three key takeaways I carry with me that impact how I approach my work all these years later. First, go to your audience to find out what they need to know about a public health



situation. *Don't make assumptions that what you want them to know is what they want/need to know.* Second, always keep health literacy in mind when delivering health information. Find out what types of people need to receive your information and the best format or delivery channel for doing so. This can't be underscored enough. People who must make health decisions during a stressful time need to have all of the information presented in a way that they can understand and act upon. And finally, always remember that these are people, not "cases."

The people affected by the anthrax situation were steeped in emotions

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*Teen Vaccine, continued from page 3*

To further raise awareness about adolescent vaccines, the Partnership for Maternal and Child Health of Northern New Jersey, in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Health, continue to host the annual Protect Me With 3+ adolescent contest.

The winners and finalists of the 9th annual contest were honored during a virtual awards ceremony on May 12, 2021. The teachers of the classrooms with the highest number of eligible entries were also honored at the ceremony. All winning entries can be viewed at [www.protectmewith3.com/winners/](http://www.protectmewith3.com/winners/).

This fall, the contest will launch its 10th annual competition. Students in middle school and high school are encouraged to submit entries! This year COVID-19 vaccine will be added as a new category. Please visit the website [www.protectmewith3.com](http://www.protectmewith3.com) for additional details.

Several additional tools and resources are available to further promote adolescent vaccination:

- **NJDOH, Vaccines for Teens and Preteens**  
[http://nj.gov/health/cd/documents/vpdp/vaccines\\_for\\_teens\\_preteens.pdf](http://nj.gov/health/cd/documents/vpdp/vaccines_for_teens_preteens.pdf)

# Protect Me With 3+

- **New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), Adolescent Immunization Toolkit**  
<http://nj.gov/health/cd/documents/vpdp/adolescent-immunization-toolkit.pdf>
- **NJDOH, Human Papillomavirus Webpage**  
<http://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/hpv.shtml>
- **NJDOH, Influenza Webpage**  
<http://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/flu.shtml>

Hard copies of select NJDOH resources are available at no cost upon request. If interested, please contact the Vaccine Preventable Disease Program at 609-826-4861. 



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## Importance of Protecting Yourself and Others from Influenza

**A**s COVID-19 safety policies such as masking and social distancing are lifted, it is important to consider potential health consequences during the return to “normal.” Relaxed COVID-19 mitigation measures will likely result in the resumption of seasonal flu virus circulation. The 2021-2022 flu season could mimic last season, or co-circulation of flu, SARS-CoV-2, and other respiratory viruses like RSV could place a renewed high burden on the health care system. While we do not know what will happen during the upcoming flu season, flu vaccination remains the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones against flu and its potentially serious complications.

Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone six months of age and older who do not have contraindications. Getting vaccinated protects you as well as those around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions. As a healthcare professional, your strong recommendation is a critical factor that affects whether your patients get an influenza vaccine. Most adults believe vaccines are important, but they need a reminder from you to get vaccinated.

According to data presented in CDC’s FluVaxView Interactive, New

Jersey’s overall vaccination rate for everyone six months of age and older in 2019-2020 was 54.0%. Vaccination estimates vary by age group with the highest vaccination coverage for children 6 months-4 years (87.3%) and the lowest among adults 18-49 years (34.6%)<sup>1</sup>. These rates are similar to past seasons. The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) has two annual influenza-focused initiatives.

### **The NJ College and University Flu Challenge:**

The Challenge encourages friendly competition between institutions of higher education to determine which campus can achieve the highest flu vaccination rates. Each participating institution develops and implements a unique influenza campaign to fit the needs of the student body. Flu vaccination coverage is measured by a short student self-reported survey. By participating in the Challenge, institutions receive access to educational resources, an award of participation, and a chance to win the traveling trophy for the year.

Visit [www.nj.gov/health/cd/edu\\_training/vpdp\\_flu\\_challenge.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/edu_training/vpdp_flu_challenge.shtml) to learn more about this initiative.

### **The NJ Influenza Honor Roll:**

The Influenza Honor Roll recognizes institutions that are striving to promote influenza awareness and prevention within their communities.

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*From the Medical Director, continued from page 1*

period, the Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS) saw a 74% increase in reports to a high of 82,345.

**Then Came COVID-19.**

In the month of March 2020 alone, 481 outbreaks – a typical year’s worth – were reported. For the entire first year of the pandemic (March 2020 – February 2021), reported outbreaks reached 1418, almost all COVID-19 related. Requiring both positive and negative SARS-CoV-2 results led to a skyrocketing of reports to CDRSS. The previous yearly high of 82,345 was eclipsed by that first month’s total of 97,977, before reaching a monthly peak in December of 868,290, and for the entire March – February period a total of over 6.5 million reports, an astounding 7,800% increase in a single year.

New Jersey’s public health system creaked and groaned on all levels. Electronic systems were upgraded then upgraded again – but still had difficulty keeping up. The human systems throughout the state were not as easily enhanced, and the strains could be seen everywhere. Stress and working hours multiplied, time off disappeared. Professionals throughout the state stepped up and did what needed to be done. But this herculean effort did not come without a price. In a recent MMWR, CDC found that 53% of public health workers across the nation reported at least one mental

health condition in the past two weeks.

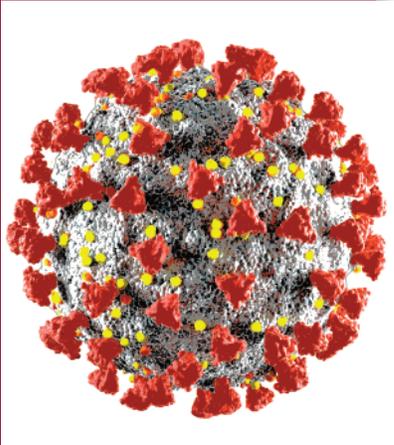
And these same overtaxed individuals needed to take on yet another essential task – helping to protect individuals and the state against another wave by vaccinating the population. And again, they responded - nearly 5.7 million New Jerseyans who are fully vaccinated, and New Jersey ranks near the top in vaccination rates.

The COVID-19 tsunami flooded a state whose public health infrastructure had been ignored for years. However under-resourced we may have been, New Jersey was blessed with dedicated, caring, and expert professionals. The pandemic is not yet over, and our job is not yet done. We continue to mourn those residents who have died, and we tally their numbers every day. It is important that we remember these individuals. There is something, however, that is even more important that can’t be counted – those residents who never became infected and whose lives were saved. These individuals and all their family, friends and loved ones, owe YOU a debt of gratitude. While the past 18 months have indeed been dark, without you they would have been even more difficult. Thank you.

**Ed Lifshitz, MD**

*Medical Director*

*Communicable Disease Service*



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## Antibiotic Awareness Week 2021!

**J**oin the New Jersey Department of Health in promoting U.S. Antibiotic Awareness Week (AAW21), November 18-24, 2021. This is an annual one-week observance that gives participating organizations an opportunity to raise awareness

of the importance of appropriate antibiotic use to combat the threat of antibiotic resistance. As always, we ask

that you forward our messages and materials to your partner organizations so that we can spread the word about antibiotic resistance to health care providers and public health professionals. Communications regarding AAW21 will be sent via LINCIS and email to members of various public health and healthcare professional organizations so be on the lookout!

As in years past, we have viral prescription pads (small tear off sheets resembling a prescription, but contain a checklist providers can use to recommend self-care comfort measures for viral illnesses), pharmacy instruction tear off pads (for patients who are prescribed an antibiotic, these sheets contain instructions for taking the medication properly to avoid resistance), and brochures about appropriate use of antibiotics. We ask that you help distribute these to your local pharmacies, public health clinics, and healthcare partners. Please contact Suzanne Miro, health educator, at [Suzanne.miro@doh.nj.gov](mailto:Suzanne.miro@doh.nj.gov) to request materials. Be sure to specify which materials you would like to have, the quantity of each and mailing address.

For a planning toolkit, materials and messages, visit [www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/week/toolkit.html](http://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/week/toolkit.html). 



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Get more information at <http://nj.gov/health/cd/handwashing.shtml>.

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*Influenza, continued from page 6*

Four categories of honorees are eligible:

- Institutions of education;
- Businesses;
- Community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations; and
- Medical facilities.

Institutions from these categories are encouraged to submit applications detailing their influenza-related activities that were implemented during the flu season. All institutions named to the New Jersey Influenza Honor Roll will be highlighted on the NJDOH website and will receive a certificate of recognition. For more information, visit [www.nj.gov/health/cd/edu\\_training/vpdp\\_flu\\_honor\\_roll.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/edu_training/vpdp_flu_honor_roll.shtml).

Increasing flu vaccination rates takes a concerted effort; family members, peers, and workplaces can all play a role in educating others about the

benefits of flu vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) has developed various resources to help recommend flu vaccination to different populations available at [www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/prepare-practice-tools.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/prepare-practice-tools.htm).

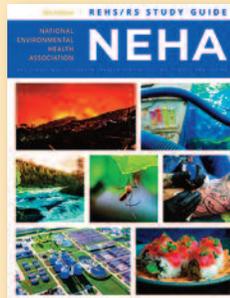
**Additional resources:**

- NJDOH Flu Website: <https://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/flu.shtml>
- NJDOH Chronic Disease and Immunization Infographics and Flyers : <https://nj.gov/health/cd/vpdp.shtml>

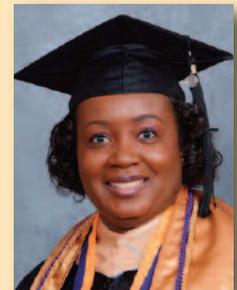
<sup>1</sup>National Immunization Survey-Flu and Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System for the General Population available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/integrative-general-population.htm> 

**Congratulations**

*Zachary Ehrlich*, CDS Regional Epidemiologist, worked with the National Environmental Health Association as a subject matter expert and contributor for "A Guide for Environmental Health Responsibilities and Competencies," 5th Edition, which was released July 2021.



*Yvonne Booker*, a Nursing Consultant with the COVID-19 Local Response Team, recently earned her Master of Business Administration degree from DeVry University with a 4.0 grade point average.





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*Anthrax, continued from page 4*

ranging from anger, fear, and sadness, yet there was intense focus on the clinical aspects such as monitoring the health of those who were exposed and receiving medical treatment as well as preventive medications. Many of them said they felt like test subjects who were being studied while their emotional health needs went largely unacknowledged. These lessons learned, among others, cannot fade away with time or the cyclical ebbing and flowing of funding that follows major public health emergencies.

In more recent years, outbreak responses have seemingly become more frequent and more complex. In the two decades that have passed since anthrax, the NJDOH has responded to thousands of disease outbreaks, most of which were routine. However, there were also those that were more memorable and rose to national prominence including H1N1 influenza, Ebola virus, and Zika virus to name a few, and it is these notable outbreaks that seem to have something in common... emerging pathogens. Many experts anticipate

that this trend will continue as the global population continues to rise, climate change alters various patterns and conditions conducive to disease spread, travel to once remote areas of the globe increases, and human encroachment on habitats where dangerous pathogens live in the shadows. As people move around the globe, pathogens have easy transport to new geography and new hosts ready to spark the next pandemic.

So, whether an outbreak originates from a biological weapon such as anthrax, or a novel influenza or coronavirus strain, these communication lessons hold the same value. Anthrax prepared us well, and had we not gained that experience 20 years ago, we might not have had the same insight, skills and abilities necessary to navigate the most recent COVID-19 pandemic.



NJDOH health educator, Suzanne Miro, pictured with NJ anthrax survivor Norma Wallace (center) and her family members, as well as CDC staff and a representative from the US Postal Service.

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*Project Firstline, continued from page 2*

educational tools on the following topics:

1. Hand Hygiene
2. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
3. The Basics of COVID-19 and Virus Transmission
4. Basic IPC Practices for Students and New Professionals

NJDOH PFL is also on social media! To like and share our content with your networks, follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

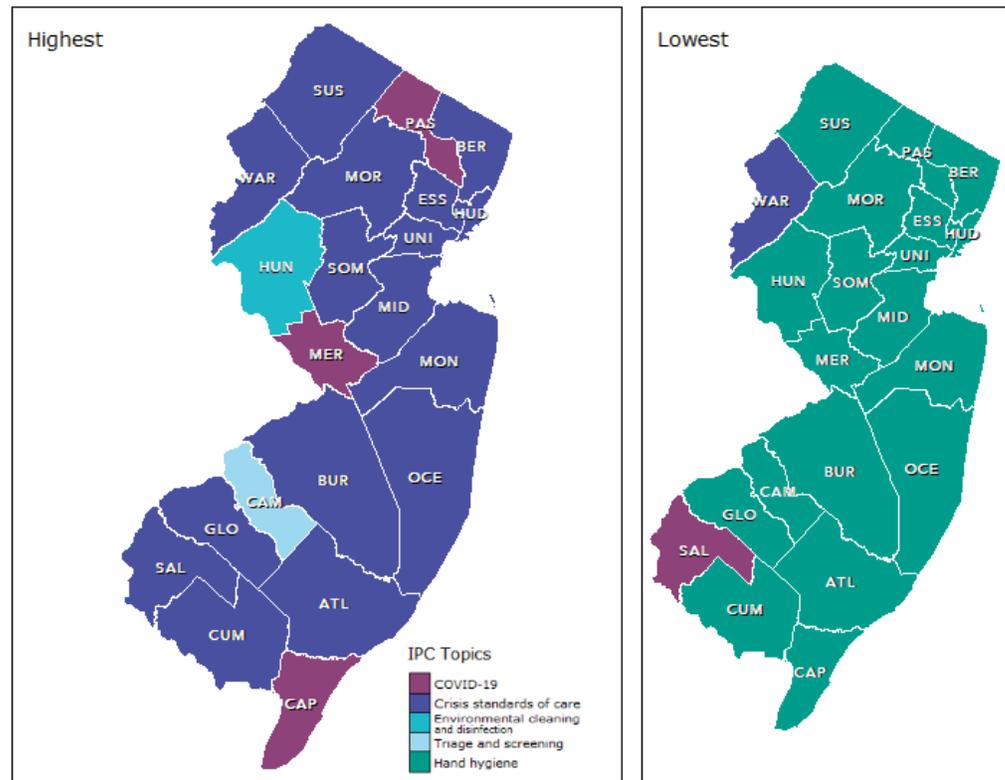
Healthcare professionals seeking CMEs, CNEs, and CPEs can now “learn and earn” with CDC PFL

through their [Training and Continuing Education Online \(TCEO\) System](#).

For more information about IPC training offerings, scheduling a training, or partnering with us, please call 609-826-5964, e-mail us at [CDS.IC.PFL@doh.nj.gov](mailto:CDS.IC.PFL@doh.nj.gov), or visit [NJDOH’s Project Firstline website](#). 



Preferred Infection Prevention and Control Training Topic by New Jersey County



Note: Data current as of July 16, 2021 with a total number of 1,022 participants. IPC topics that were not included were microbiology basics, personal protective equipment, and standard transmission-based precautions.



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## Hot Shots for Tots Immunization Initiative

The New Jersey Vaccine Preventable Disease Program is reinstating the Hot Shots for Tots (HSFT) Immunization Campaign for the 2021-22 school year. The campaign was paused last year due to the closing and/or reduced operation of many childcare facilities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The HSFT campaign is a voluntary, point-based incentive program for child care (including preschool). The campaign encourages and facilitates a collaboration with immunization stakeholders to promote best practices and improve immunization coverage. Participating facilities select from qualifying immunization related activities to earn points toward reaching one of the three award levels: Gold, Silver, or Bronze. Examples of qualifying activities include: attending an annual immunization workshop, participating in the New Jersey Immunization Information System (NJIS), and providing information to

parents about childhood immunizations.

For a complete list of activities and more details about the campaign visit [https://nj.gov/health/cd/imm\\_requirements/vpdp\\_hotshots.shtml](https://nj.gov/health/cd/imm_requirements/vpdp_hotshots.shtml).

As opportunities for in-person learning and play continue to grow, help us protect children by doing what you can to get kids caught up on recommended vaccines. Your participation in this campaign will provide you with the tools necessary to ensure compliance with the New Jersey immunization requirements and establish best practices for your child care facility.

The campaign kickoff will be held via webinar on Monday, November 15th at 2:30 p.m. If your childcare facility is interested in participating, please send an email to [jenish.sudhakaran@doh.nj.gov](mailto:jenish.sudhakaran@doh.nj.gov) 

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## The Return of Webinars!

Over the summer, the Communicable Disease Service (CDS) offered three webinars featuring CDS subject matter experts. The purpose of the webinars was to provide guidance and updates for public health investigators. Presenters provided updated case definitions and cases classifications, revised investigation documents, and other relevant information to assist disease investigators.

Webinar links and/or presenter slides are posted to the specific disease pages under “Resources and References”:

### Hepatitis C:

<https://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/hepatitis.c.shtml>

### Legionellosis:

<https://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/legion.shtml>

### Rabies:

<https://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/rabies.shtml>

### NJ Learning Management Network – Your Key to Registering!

Registering for a CDS webinar? Remember it is a 2-step process. You **MUST** register on NJLMN directly. Then, once you get a confirmation of your NJLMN registration, click the link in the message to register on

Go-To-Webinar (to receive the link for the webinar). If you do not receive a registration confirmation message from NJLMN, this means that you are **NOT** registered on NJLMN.

CDS uses NJLMN to verify/award continuing education credits/contact hours. **If you are not registered on NJLMN, you will not receive the evaluation link after the webinar and credits may not be awarded.** A completed evaluation is required for those seeking continuing education credits. If you are seeking credits, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are registered correctly and complete the evaluation within the specified timeframe.

Be sure to put NJLMN in your address book: [NJLMN@njlincs.net](mailto:NJLMN@njlincs.net) to ensure that you receive messages from NJLMN. Some email providers view NJLMN messages as spam and reject them unless NJLMN is included in your address book!

Need a NJLINC account? Training opportunities are sent via LINC messages. Be sure you get notice of upcoming trainings by requesting your NJLINC account today! Go to: [njlincs.net](http://njlincs.net) and scroll down the menu bar on the left to TOOLS and click on “Request new account.” 

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Past issues of the New Jersey Communi-CABLE are available online at:  
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*INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL (IPC)  
TIP OF THE WEEK*



**BE ON THE LOOK OUT FOR  
WEEKLY TIPS ON ALL NJ DOH  
SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES!**



**The NJDOH Communicable Disease Service includes:**

Infectious and Zoonotic Disease Program (IZDP): 609-826-5964

Regional Epidemiology Program (REP): 609-826-5964

Vaccine Preventable Disease Program (VPDP): 609-826-4860

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