

El Paso County Public Health Director’s Report

To: The El Paso County Board of Health
From: Susan Wheelan, M.B.A. Public Health Director
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In the News

On Dec. 24, the Gazette featured an in-depth [article on retail food inspections](#) and the steady growth of local retail food establishments, despite the challenges of the pandemic. The article highlights the educational approach El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) utilizes in working with retail food partners.

On Dec. 27, the Gazette published an article on the [renovations to Public Health South](#). The remodel, which began in 2022 and is expected to be complete early this year, has focused on safety enhancements and expanding community access.

Program Spotlight

The Air Quality Program consists of numerous activities related to air quality and public health. The program provides education, permitting, and, when necessary, enforcement. The Air Quality Program covers radon, dust, odor, and smoke.

In January, EPCPH prioritizes National Radon Action Month by urging residents to test their homes for the radioactive gas. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and poses a significant risk in El Paso County. Testing is an affordable method to determine if a resident has elevated radon levels.

A portion of the El Paso County Air Quality Program is contracted through the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) Air Pollution Control Division and is the designated authority to respond to and investigate opacity and odor complaints. Regulations set in place by the Clean Air Act and the Colorado Air Quality Control Commission are enforced for stationary sources through complaint investigations. Opacity complaint investigations could include on-site reading of emissions (typically smoke or dust), looking for off-property transport of emissions, and collaborating with the source of the complaint to

implement cost-effective and efficient air pollution control measures to reduce emissions. Odor complaint investigations include on-site visits to sense odors using a Nasal Ranger to test the dilution ratio to assure the amount of odor present complies with the regulations. Environmental Health (EH) staff are routinely certified to read opacity and detect odor through trainings at CDPHE. Team members investigate an average of 39 air quality complaints per year.

The program also issues open burn permits. Open Burn permit applications are accepted and reviewed by trained EH Specialists to assure the materials to be burned will not release toxins or other air quality pollutants. EH verifies adequate fire safety protocols are in place per the El Paso County Ordinance 22-001 by working closely with the local fire authorities and the El Paso County Fire Warden. Over the last several years, EH has issued an average of 20 open burn permits a year.

EH issues construction activity permits (CAP) per the El Paso County Board of Health Chapter 5 Air Quality Regulations. CAP Applications are reviewed by EH staff to assure a proper control plan is submitted and in place. This program aims to reduce the release of fugitive particulate emissions (dust) for any property owner engaged in excavating, grading, filling, or other construction activities on properties of one acre or larger in size, up to 25 acres in size.

Agency Operations

In 2008, the Colorado Public Health Act required the State Board of Health to establish, by rule, the core public health services that each county and district public health agency must provide or assure as well as establish minimum quality standards for those public health services. A revised ruling ([6 CCR 1014-7](#)), effective January 1, 2020, now requires state and local health departments in Colorado to assure provision of seven Foundational Capabilities and five Foundational Services.



Image courtesy of the [Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials](#).

El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) fulfills its statutory requirement of providing these core public health services through the work of its divisions and programs. Activities supporting these services for the timeframe of this report follow.

Foundational Public Health Capabilities

Assessment and Planning

- The Public Health Data & Analytics (PHDA) Office is finalizing two data dashboards which will feature in-depth information on suicide and drug overdose deaths. The Colorado Health Institute (CHI), which has been providing technical support to develop the dashboards, hosted several interactive trainings during December on dashboard maintenance. Both dashboards are in the final stages of development, with an anticipated launch date of early 2024.

Communications

- The Office of Communication (OoC) continues to make steady progress on the website redesign project, which is scheduled to be completed in early 2024. Strategic planning and design efforts have led to the creation of a modern and easy-to-navigate homepage, with the goal of making information easily accessible.
- Throughout 2023, the OoC focused on increasing video content across social media, in alignment with social media strategies, trends and best practices. In particular, the team focused on increasing reels on Instagram—which are very brief, full-screen vertical videos ranging from 15 to 90 seconds—as a new way to reach a wider audience. Key benefits of reels include accelerating engagement, building trust, creating storytelling opportunities, reaching new audiences, and improving brand awareness. The results of these efforts were significant, yielding the following impact:
 - A total of 31 reels on Instagram in 2023 (compared to five reels in 2022).
 - A total of 22,413 video views, which represents a 2,289 percent increase over 2022.
 - Net follower growth increased by 202 on Instagram, a 349 percent increase over 2022.
- EPCPH's website www.elpasocountyhealth.org had more than 9,000 new visitors in December, with more than 24,000 pageviews.

Partnerships – Year in Review

In 2023, Fountain Valley Communities that Care (FV-CTC) continued to address youth substance use prevention for marijuana and prescription medications and continued planning for youth-led initiatives, community and school district resourcing around substances, and fentanyl-specific related education. FV-CTC hosted two semi-annual Drug Take Back Days in partnership with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), local law enforcement, and the Security Fire Department, and collected over 350 pounds of unused and expired prescription medications from Fountain Valley. Additionally, FV-CTC provided 100 medication lockboxes to families to decrease accessibility and potential misuse of prescription medications and distributed 25

Naloxone kits to community members during the October Drug Take Back event. The addition of the Naloxone kits created an opportunity for FV-CTC to help address the stigma around seeking the appropriate help for those who use or misuse substances.

Also in 2023, FV-CTC hosted a community event to promote Connect Me 2 FV (Fountain Valley), an initiative aimed at incentivizing and rewarding youth for engaging in safe and healthy activities in their community. FV-CTC awarded \$30,000 in mini-grants to six programs that created safe community spaces for youth or created community protective factors such as resiliency, responsibility, academic engagement and achievement, physical activity, or a combination of the above.

The Tobacco Education Prevention Partnership (TEPP) continued its partnerships with local school districts to help them address youth vaping by providing 37 school presentations that reached more than 1,100 students and 175 teachers and administration. TEPP also attended 14 school functions that reached approximately 1,125 students and their families and 25 staff members.

Through a competitive application process, TEPP awarded 10 mini-grants for middle and high schools in El Paso County. Each of the following schools were awarded \$4,000 to help strengthen, communicate, and enforce their Tobacco Free School policy during the 2023-2024 school year: Fox Meadow Middle School, Manitou Springs Middle School, Discovery High School, Mesa Ridge High School, Carson Middle School, Fountain-Fort Carson High School, Galileo Middle School, Palmer High School, Sand Creek High School, and Skyview Middle School.

TEPP also expanded its partnerships by providing staff education and client tobacco cessation resources to six community health care and/or social service agencies. TEPP staff presented to the RISE Southeast Coalition and reached approximately 60 stakeholders and residents. TEPP also hosted six Tobacco-Free Alliance meetings to share tobacco and nicotine prevention information with community partners.

The program sponsored three major community events in 2023: Pikes Peak Pride, El Paso County Fair, and Fiestas Patrias with an estimated total outreach of over 100,000 people.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Activated the Public Health Emergency Operations (PHEOP) plan on 12/19/23 in response to a confirmed case of measles in Colorado. To manage the internal response, an incident command system organizational structure was established to assure clear coordination, communication, and streamline response efforts across the agency.

- Identified, investigated and provided post-exposure prophylaxis as indicated to El Paso County residents with known exposure to measles.
- Provided resource support to Arapahoe Public Health by transferring 300 N95 masks to support a large-scale vaccine operation associated with the measles case.

Foundational Public Health Services

Communicable Disease Prevention, Investigation and Control

Respiratory disease season officially started Oct. 1.

EPCPH is actively participating in surveillance of hospitalized RSV and influenza cases impacting our communities;

- o The EPCPH flu dashboard can be found at the following link:
www.elpasocountyhealth.org/service/infectious-diseases/influenza-flu-prevention

Environmental Public Health

EPCPH applied for the 2023-2024 Indoor Radon Grant from CDPHE. The grant of \$11,726.02 was approved on December 14, 2023. This is an important funding source providing education on the importance of testing homes for radon in El Paso County.

Maternal Child Health (MCH)

In 2023, the Maternal Child Health (MCH) program provided 43 trainings on social and emotional well-being to organizations including Schriever Air Force Base, Catamount Institute, Colorado College, Department of Human Services, Fountain Fort Carson Mountain Post Behavioral Health Team, Forge Evolution, Kidpower, Colorado Springs Police Department, the U.S. Olympic Safe Swim board and more, reaching a total of 910 individuals.

Also in 2023, MCH made 141 referrals for families who have a child with a special health care need, focusing on improving access to resources. Staff attended 20 outreach events to inform caregivers and community partners on resource navigation and other services offered within EPCPH, reaching 400 individuals.

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) nurses conducted 188 visits in December 2023. Connecting clients to other needed community resources is a key function of the NFP program. In December, NFP nurses made 41 referrals on behalf of 36 individual families. Referrals were made for housing, mental health treatment, Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, childcare, lactation support, WIC, and education, among others.

In December, Nurse-Family Partnership and the Colorado Community Health Alliance (CCHA) jointly hosted a quarterly Community Advisory Board meeting, bringing together a variety of health care professionals and community resources that serve families and young children in El Paso County. Presenters included a representative from The Resource Exchange speaking about their services, and representative from the dental benefits division of Medicaid.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Throughout 2023, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) continued to serve pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age 5 through food benefits, community referrals, nutrition education and breastfeeding support. In 2023, the average monthly enrollment was 13,389. The number of unduplicated participants was 20,940.

WIC staff continued strong partnerships with internal resources such as NFP, Reproductive Health Clinic, and Care Coordination. Approximately 813 referrals were made between the programs throughout 2023.

Through continued community partnerships at Catholic Charities, Fort Carson Army Community Service, Ronald McDonald House, Lutheran Family Service Refugee Services, Air Force Academy Military and Family Readiness Center, and Calhan Community Outreach Center, WIC information and WIC appointments, were provided to community members. Offering WIC services at these locations alleviates transportation barriers as well as helps to foment greater community trust and increase awareness of services available throughout the county.

WIC also continued robust lactation support for WIC clients in 2023. The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program (BFPC) had a total monthly average of 1,493 contacts and an average monthly enrollment of 1,130 clients. There was an average of 155 new clients each month. Approximately 57 Spanish-speaking clients and 476 English speaking clients attended the virtual breastfeeding class, and 466 electric breast pumps were issued.

Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention and Behavioral Health Promotion

In 2023, TEPP received 18 secondhand smoke complaints from the community. Eleven of these complaints pertained to smoke permeating neighboring housing units, creating a health concern and nuisance to the resident(s). There were seven other complaints more generalized around people smoking within 25 feet of a business entrance. As noted by the U.S. Surgeon General, there is no safe level of secondhand smoke. Residents of multi-unit housing units are disparately affected by tobacco and vape use by neighbors who live in close proximity.

In 2023, TEPP presented an updated Tobacco Cessation Referral Policy training to EPCPH staff. The purpose of the policy training is to promote and increase referrals made to the Colorado Quitline. 24 staff were trained to screen clients for tobacco use and refer to the Colorado Quitline. The Colorado Quitline received the following inquiries from El Paso County residents:

- Phone calls: 747 (as of mid-December)
- Web-based: 2,022: (as of mid-December)
- Number of QuitLine referrals made by EPCPH staff: 29

Access to and Linkage with Healthcare

The Care Coordination program recently partnered with University of Colorado - Colorado Springs (UCCS) students at the Springs Rescue Mission podiatry clinic. The coordinators met with 37 guests and provided health supplies, connection to community resources, and 49 Narcan kits to those seeking Narcan for themselves or for a friend or loved one living with a substance use disorder or in recovery.

Care Coordination YTD 2023	
Referrals	873
COVID-19 Referrals	75
Events	20
Outreach (tours, meetings, conferences, presentations and trainings)	53
COVID-19 Test kits distributed	649
Narcan kits distributed	49
Care packages distributed	86

Appendix A: End of Year Data

End of year numbers are still being received; 2023 data for EPCPH programs will be included in February's report.

Definitions of Foundational Terms

Foundational Public Health Capabilities

Assessment and Planning- Colorado's governmental public health system will apply the principles and skilled practice of epidemiology, laboratory investigation, surveillance and program evaluation to support planning, policy and decision making in Colorado.

Communications - Colorado's governmental public health system will be a trusted source of clear, consistent, accurate and timely health and environmental information.

Policy Development and Support - Colorado's governmental public health system will inform and implement policies to meet the community's changing health needs. Public health policies will aim to eliminate health disparities, reduce death and disability, and improve environmental quality and health outcomes for all people in Colorado.

Partnerships - Colorado's governmental public health system will create, convene, and support strategic partnerships, engage community members and cross-sectoral partners, agencies, and organizations to achieve public health goals.

Organizational Competencies – No official definition from CDPHE but this section will be used to report on QI, accreditation, finance/budget, governance, awards, etc.

Emergency Preparedness and Response - Colorado's governmental public health system, in coordination with federal, state and local agencies and public and private sector partners, will have the capability and capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies with health, environmental and medical impacts.

Social Determinants of Health - Colorado's governmental public health system will intentionally focus on improving systems and institutions that exacerbate health disparities so that all people and communities in Colorado can achieve the highest level of health possible. Governmental public health will have the requisite skills, competencies, and capacities to play an essential role in creating comprehensive strategies needed to address health inequities, and social and environmental determinants of health.

Foundational Public Health Services

Communicable Disease Prevention, Investigation and Control - Colorado's governmental public health system will carry out state and locally coordinated surveillance, disease investigation, laboratory testing, and prevention and control strategies to monitor and reduce the incidence and transmission of communicable diseases. Programs will target illnesses that are vaccine-preventable, zoonotic, vector-borne, respiratory, food- or water-borne, bloodborne, healthcare associated, and sexually transmitted as well as emerging threats. Communicable

Commented [VB1]: I pulled definitions of each section from CDPHE. Should we leave descriptions for the final report or just use them as internal references for the report template. Some context may be helpful for the actual report, but does take up a lot of space.

Disease Control will collaborate with national, state, and local partners to assure mandates and guidelines are met and timely, actionable information is provided to the public and to health professionals.

Environmental Public Health - Colorado's governmental public health system will use evidence-informed practices to understand the cause-and-effect relationships between environmental changes and ecological and human health impacts, to protect, promote, and enhance the health of the community and environment. Agencies will participate in the protection and improvement of air quality, water, land, and food safety by identifying, investigating, and responding to community environmental health concerns, reducing current and emerging environmental health risks, preventing communicable diseases, and sustaining the environment in a coordinated manner with agencies at the federal, state, and local levels as well as industry stakeholders and the public.

Maternal, Child, Adolescent and Family Health - Colorado's governmental public health system will develop, implement and evaluate state-wide, regional and local strategies related to maternal, child, adolescent and family health to increase health and wellbeing, reduce adverse health outcomes and advance health equity across the life course. Strategies may include but are not limited to identifying and providing information, promoting evidence-informed and multi-generational approaches, identifying community assets, advocating for needed initiatives, and convening partners.

Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention and Behavioral Health Promotion - Colorado's governmental public health system focuses on common risk and protective factors that affect social, emotional and physical health and safety. To prevent chronic disease and injuries and promote behavioral health, Colorado's governmental public health system will use policy, systems and environmental change strategies to comprehensively address the root causes of poor health outcomes and advance health equity. Priority areas include, but are not limited to, nutrition, physical activity, oral health, access to care and disease management, injury prevention, violence prevention, suicide prevention, mental health and substance use (including tobacco, alcohol and other substances).

Access to and Linkage with Healthcare - All Coloradans should be connected with and have access to needed personal health care services that include primary care, maternal and child health care, oral health care, specialty care, and mental health care. All Coloradans should be connected with and have access to needed personal health care services that include primary care, maternal and child health care, oral health care, specialty care, and mental health care.