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## January 2025 Newsletter - Downeast Public Health Council

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### Downeast Public Health Council January 2025 Newsletter: New Year



- [Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Downeast Public Health District](#)
- [Downeast Public Health Council \(DEPHC\)](#)
- [Events/ Trainings](#)
- [News](#)
- [HANs](#)

### Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention



[Maine CDC](#) is an office of the Department of Health and Human Services with a mission to protect and promote the health and well-being of the people of Maine. It envisions a strong, safe and healthy Maine.

The current Director of Maine CDC is **Dr. Puthiery Va.** She joined the Maine CDC in August 2023 with a medical degree from the University of New England, and has previously served as the Director of the

#### Next Downeast Public Council Meeting

Friday, January 17, 2025

10:00 - 12:00 PM

Zoom

For Council information, please contact [Al May](#)



[Downeast Public Health Council  
Facebook Page](#)

[Downeast Public Health Council  
Website](#)

[Maine CDC Downeast District  
Website](#)

To become a member of the Downeast Public Health Council please fill out our [Membership Application](#).

#### Downeast Public Health 2024 Priority Committees

**Prevention Committee:** Angela Fochesato, Chair

Division of Public Health in Chinle, Arizona and  
Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer at the U.S. CDC.

The Maine CDC has [6 divisions](#):

1. Division of Environmental Health
2. Division of Disease Prevention
3. Division of Public Health Nursing
4. **Division of Public Health Systems**
5. Division of Disease Surveillance
6. Office of Population Health Equity

Each division is organized into a number of programs  
unique to the division's work.

**Division of Public Health Systems**

The Division of Public Health Systems' mission is to  
protect the health and lives of people in Maine by  
strengthening the ability of health agencies and  
partner organizations to detect, contain and manage  
public health threats and emergencies.

The Division consists of:

1. Data, Research and Vital Statistics
2. Maine Cancer Registry
3. Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory
4. Local Health Officers
5. **Local Public Health Districts**
6. Public Health Emergency Preparedness
7. Rural Health and Primary Care
8. Statewide Coordinating Council
9. Tribal Public Health

**Public Health Districts**

The Maine Legislature and the Maine Department of  
Health and Human Services (DHHS) approved the  
creation of eight public health districts in 2008, based  
on population size, geographic boundaries (county  
borders), and hospital service areas. A Tribal Health  
District was established in 2011 in partnership with the  
five Maine Tribal jurisdictions, with limits determined  
by Tribal Health Centre service regions as well as  
tribal jurisdictional boundaries.

The Public Health Districts were established to  
enhance effective and efficient delivery of public  
health services by:

- Creating the geographic and local framework  
for greater consistency and equity in statewide  
delivery of all [10 Essential Public Health  
Services](#).
- Providing a consistent basis for regional  
planning and coordination across the  
governmental, private (including business),  
public, and nonprofit sectors.
- Building sustainable infrastructure through  
regional co-location of Maine CDC and DHHS  
staff, and through an interactive, fully  
participatory District Coordinating Councils.

**Downeast Public  
Health District**

**Older Adult Health and Safety  
Committee:** Dante Zanoni, Chair

**Emergency Operations and  
Response Committee:** Andrew  
Sankey, Chair

**Mental Health Primary Care  
Education Committee:** Tracy  
Parker, Chair

**2024 Ongoing Topics**

Health Literacy

Palliative Care and Hospice

Maternal and Child Health

**Events/ Trainings**

**January 14**

Downeast HCC Chapter Meeting

To become a member [contact](#).

**February 5-6**

[Medical Leadership in Disaster  
Preparedness and Response:  
Virtual Conference.](#)

**February 25-27**

[L0105: Public Information  
Basics.](#)

For more information [contact](#).

[PHEP training and exercise  
calendar.](#)

**News**

[U.S. Surgeon General Issues  
New Advisory on Link Between  
Alcohol and Cancer Risk](#)

[CDC Confirms First Severe Case  
of H5N1 Bird Flu in the United  
States.](#)

[Commissioner Gagné-Holmes  
Appoints Director to Maine  
CDC's New Office of Injury and  
Violence Prevention.](#)

[Timeline for Lifespan Waiver  
Implementation Comes into  
Focus as Program Development  
Continues.](#)

[Maine DHHS provides final  
update on MaineCare  
"unwinding".](#)

**HANs**

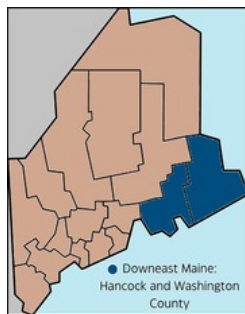
[Highly Pathogenic Avian  
Influenza A\(H5N1\): Reminders  
for Clinicians and Veterinarians.](#)

**National Radon Action Month**

Radon is an odorless and  
invisible radioactive gas released  
from rocks, soil and water. All  
outdoor and indoor air has some  
radon in it.

**Why does it matter?**

- Radon can accumulate  
and get trapped in the air  
no matter how old or new



Maine's District 7 is the [Downeast Public Health District](#) that covers Hancock and Washington Counties. The Downeast Public Health District consists of a Public Health Unit (includes Maine CDC staff) located in the DHHS offices in Ellsworth, Machias and Calais.

The [Public Health Unit](#) consists of staff from:

1. **Public Health Nursing Division-** *Cynthia Grass, Stephanie Lavigne, Catherine MacDonald, Kerri Jones.*
2. **Division of Environmental Health:** Health Inspection Program- *Weibley Dean.*
3. **Division of Disease Surveillance:** Infectious Diseases Epidemiology Program- *Maura Lockwood.*
4. **Division of Environmental Health:** Drinking Water Program- *Scott Whitney, Mary Bourque.*
5. Public Health Educator- [Kawther Mohamed.](#)
6. District Public Health Liaison- [Alfred May.](#)

The coordination of the Downeast Public Health Unit is carried out by the District Public Health Liaison: Alfred May.

Each Public Health District has a Public Health Council which is a representative, district-wide body formed in partnership with the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) to engage in collaborative planning and decision-making for the delivery of the [10 Essential Public Health Services](#) in the Public Health Districts.

## Downeast Public Health Council (DEPHC)



The [Downeast Public Health Council](#) function is to mobilize working partnerships to coordinate efforts and resources within the District to produce results that no one community, organization, or sector could achieve effectively or efficiently alone.

With a mission to promote the health of all our communities by providing public health information, coordination, collaboration, and advocacy, the Downeast Public Health Council envisions the Downeast Maine communities as the healthiest in the state.

### Responsibilities of the DEPHC:

- a house or building is, whether its basement is sealed or drafty.
- There is no safe threshold for radon levels, however the U.S. EPA, recommends fixing buildings with levels above 4 pCi/L.
- Radon is the second cause of lung cancer in the U.S.

Only 32.3% of adults are living in households tested for radon in Hancock county, while only 18.7% were tested for radon in Washington county which was significantly lower than the state's at 34.9%.

#### How to reduce radon risk?

1. Testing your home and office for radon using a radon testing kit.
2. Send kit to approved laboratory.
3. Fixing your home or notify your office building if radon levels are high.

#### How to keep radon levels low?

1. Seal cracks in floors and walls with plaster or other materials.
2. Cover the earth floor in crawl spaces with high density plastic sheet.
3. Increase air flow in the house or building by opening windows and using fans and vents to circulate air.

The [Maine Radiation Control Program's](#) Radon Section is taking requests for a [free inspection](#) of radon mitigation systems that have been installed by a state-registered mitigation contractor or by a builder during construction. The program also registers radon service providers including labs, contractors and testing companies with a proven level of training.

#### [Testing Radon in your home](#)

#### [Radon-Resistant Construction Basics and Techniques](#)

#### [Reducing Radon in Schools](#)

#### [Radon Testing/ General Information and links](#)

#### [Search for companies and Labs registered in Maine to test for Radon.](#)

### Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Cervical cancer is a disease causing cervix cells to grow out of control, primarily caused by HPV infection. Early detection is highly treatable, resulting in long survival and improved quality of life for those affected.

- Identifying district public health issues and priorities using an assessment process;
- Coordinating and assuring public health services in our communities;
- Addressing health disparities in the district;
- Convening non-traditional public health partners;
- Advising on public health policy and allocation of funding;
- Preparing and maintaining the public health system for public health accreditation.

The Council is composed of member organizations representing public health "sectors" that are described in the Council's bylaws and interested people within the District. Currently the DEPHC consists of members from 50 organizations representing public health sectors in the Downeast District.

Active council members are nominated and then elected annually to serve on the Council's Executive Committee. The Executive Committee guides and facilitates the Council's work.

Current Executive Committee Members:

- Angela Fochesato – Beth C. Wright Cancer Resource Center
- Andrew Sankey – Hancock County EMA
- Helen Burlock – Maine Council on Aging
- Tracy Parker- CHCS
- Maria Donahue - Healthy Acadia
- Alfred May - Maine CDC

The Downeast Public Health Council meets six times a year, every other month. Meetings are either held virtually or in-person. **Next meeting details and current priorities/ committees can be found on the top right column.**

To get involve and learn more about the Downeast Public Health Council's work, contact Alfred May, District Public Health Liaison- [alfred.may@maine.gov](mailto:alfred.may@maine.gov).

## Local Health Officers



Maine's [Local Health Officers](#) (or "LHOs") have a long and proud tradition of serving Maine's local communities, with a role established in 1885 by Maine Statute. LHOs are appointed by their municipality and serve locally and have an important role in the coordination between state and local public health.

### What is the role of the LHOs?

The LHO's role and duties are outlined in [Title 22 M.R.S.A. §454-A](#). The LHO has five primary functions:

1. Overall health resource to the community;
2. Mediator-problem solver;
3. Investigator-Enforcer;

The rate of HPV-related cancer new cases in Hancock county was **17.5/100,000** population and in Washington county **21.7/100,000** population which are higher than the state's rate at **15.4/100,000** population (2019-2021).

73.9% of the population in Hancock county were up-to-date with their cervical cancer screenings, while 78.9% were up-to-date in Washington county both lower than the state rate of 82.0% (2018 & 2020).

#### How to protect?

HPV vaccine prevents new HPV infections from occurring. The vaccine is recommended for preteens but can be started as early as 9 years old through 26 years of age.

[Maine "Start at 9" Campaign to prevent HPV cancers.](#)

#### How to screen?

Cervical cancer risk can be lowered by getting screening regularly starting 21 years old.

- HPV test: looks for the virus that causes cervical cancer.
- Pap smear: looks for precancerous cell changes on the cervix.

The [Maine Breast and Cervical Health Program](#) (MBCHP) offers screening and diagnostic services to underserved women, public education, and community partnerships. It covers office visits, including Pap smear tests and high-risk HPV tests.

For more information on eligibility, coverage and enrollment please [visit](#) or call 1-800-350-5180...Press 1.

[List of MBCHP Health Care Providers.](#)

[List of MBCHP Diagnostic Providers.](#)

[Information for MBCHP Providers](#)



#### Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is colorless, odorless, and poisonous; it can kill at any time. Every year, it causes thousands of people to become ill and claims hundreds of lives. The deadly gas is produced by a range of domestic appliances, including portable generators, charcoal grills, and furnaces that burn gas or oil.

#### How to recognize CO poisoning?

- Headache

- 4. Reporter to municipal leadership (Select Board, Manager) on community's public health status;
- 5. Reporter to Maine CDC on any perceived local public health threats.

Downeast District LHOs:

The Downeast Public Health District has 85 municipalities with 80 Local Health Officers. **Alfred May**, the Downeast Public Health District Liaison, is responsible for coordinating technical assistance and training of Local Health Officers. **Heather Sneff** is the statewide LHO Coordinator, providing expertise in training and building information supports through our website.

Types of complaints for LHOs:

- Drinking Water: well water contamination and community water system breakdowns.
- Dangerous Buildings.
- Excess filth/garbage on properties.
- Rodent/animal home invasion.
- Unlawful dumping.
- Indoor living moisture/mold issues.
- Landlord - tenant Issues.
- Dead animals.
- Malfunctioning septic systems.

[Search for LHOs.](#)

[Learn more on becoming a LHO.](#)

[Resources for LHOs.](#)

Sources: *Maine DHHS, Maine CDC, Downeast Public Health Council, Maine Shared CHNA, U.S. CDC, EPA.*

- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Confusion
- Upset stomach
- Vomiting
- Chest pain
- Unconsciousness

In Washington county 13 visits to the ED were due to CO poisoning while in Hancock county there were 9 visits in 2024.

How to lower CO poisoning risk?

- Install, replace and check CO detectors.
- Maintain and service heating systems.
- Check and clean chimneys yearly.
- [Operate power generators safely outdoors.](#)
- Never run cars or trucks inside a garage.
- Have a mechanic check the exhaust system yearly.

Learn more:

[CO poisoning.](#)

[U.S. CDC](#)

Epi/infectious disease corner:

[Infectious Disease Reports](#)

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.” *Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963)*



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