

LLHD HIGHLIGHTS

Keeping Up with Your Health Department

March 2024 — Issue 4

Director's Corner

Happy Spring Everyone!

This time of year always feels so hopeful—the sun is out longer, we are able to enjoy the fresh air, things are starting to look green again! I know I am dreaming about my garden and adjusting my planting plans based on what vegetables my kids are into this year. If you are thinking about growing food this season there are lots of options and supports in our area – from community gardens to classes to tips for growing vegetables in pots. Reach out if you are interested in being connected to these community resources.

We're also marking four years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm remembering back to when we weren't sure what was going to happen with schools or whether we could plan graduation parties or how we could best protect ourselves—what a confusing and scary time it was. I'm holding space for everyone in our community who lost someone over the last four years or who is dealing with long COVID or other health challenges. We see you and you are not alone. Thankfully we have layers of protection through vaccines and more understanding of the virus now but COVID is still with us and still impacting people's lives and health. Please reach out if you need information or resources.

And now to the newsletter! As usual there is so much going on at your health department! From food allergy awareness to violence prevention you'll find a selection of highlights and important information in this edition (and more things shared on our social media so give us a follow when you get a chance!). Have questions about something you see here? Want to connect with us about another topic? We are just a phone call or email away, so please reach out!



On behalf of the team,

A handwritten signature in orange ink that reads "Jen".

Jennifer Muggeo, jmuggeo@llhd.org

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Did you miss an issue of LLHD Highlights?
Visit our website at llhd.org/about-us/newsroom/



LLHD team members and community partners gather for the Ribbon Cutting for The Place for CommUNITY Wellbeing on March 14, 2024.

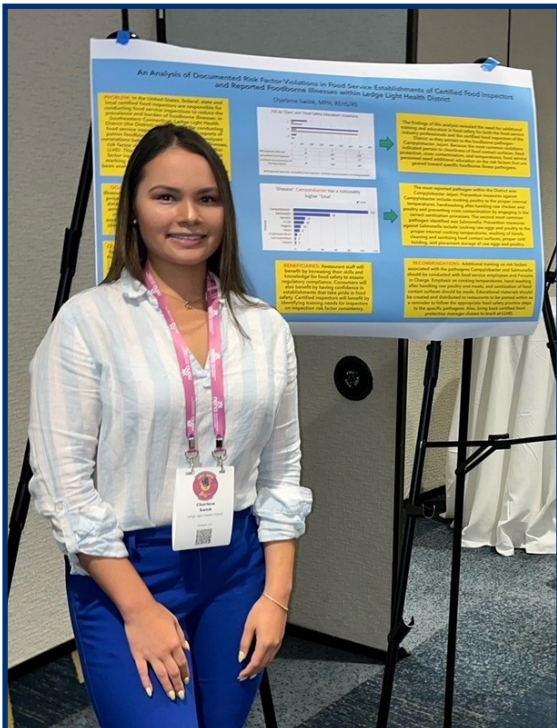
Food Allergy Awareness in Restaurants

In 2023 Connecticut passed a law (PA. 23-115) requiring food allergy awareness in all restaurants throughout the state. Food allergies are very common and may be minor or very severe. Allergy symptoms may present in various ways - some people may feel an itchy mouth or eyes or a runny nose, while other people may experience wheezing, difficulty breathing and even anaphylaxis, which is the closing of the air way. One important requirement in Public Act 23-115 is that restaurants must display an informational poster in their establishment that is visible to all staff describing the most common allergy causing foods, the actions a server should take when a customer notifies them that they have an allergy, ways kitchen staff and servers can prevent cross contact of allergen causing foods and information about dialing 911 in case of an allergic reaction. Restaurants are required to display this poster by March 1, 2024. Ledge Light Health District Inspectors will be handing the poster out during their routine inspections of restaurants and smaller copies of the poster can be found on our website at www.llhd.org. The poster is also available in multiple languages. Feel free to call and chat with a District inspector if you have additional questions about food allergies. **Katie Baldwin, kbaldwin@llhd.org**



Posters reminding food service workers and customers about food allergies.

NEHA Leadership Academy



Charlene Swink presents her foodborne illness risk factor study at the Annual Education Conference in New Orleans, August 2023.

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) is a nationwide association whose mission is “to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce.” Many of Ledge Light Health District’s Environmental Staff belong to this association, and several also hold the prestigious Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) certification. NEHA is a valuable resource for training environmental staff. In 2021, a pilot leadership academy was launched to train environmental health professionals to become future leaders. The academy consists of 4-hour virtual training once a month for an entire year and then an in-person presentation of a special project at the annual NEHA Annual Education Conference (AEC). In 2022, LLHD Senior Sanitarian Charlene Swink was awarded acceptance to the cohort academy out of hundreds of candidates and successfully presented a foodborne illness risk factor study at the July 2022 AEC in New Orleans. In 2023, LLHD Sanitarian Joseph Blanchard was also accepted into the program! Joseph will be presenting his special project on creating Ledge Light Health District’s standard operating procedures for land use at the 2024 AEC in Philadelphia this July. Ledge Light Health District is extremely proud of Charlene and Joseph for their hard work and their contributions to the future of environmental health professionals! **Katie Baldwin, kbaldwin@llhd.org**

COVID-19—sometimes forgotten but not gone!

Although the COVID-19 emergency may seem to be over, it's important to remember that the virus is still present and we must continue to take measures to prevent its transmission. COVID-19 remains a significant concern, and the JN.1 variant, a descendant of the Omicron family, has emerged as the dominant strain in the US, accounting for over 96% of cases. This variant has an additional mutation on its spike protein, making it highly contagious and difficult for the immune system to combat. As a result, people who are exposed to it are more susceptible to respiratory infections. The symptoms of COVID-19 tend to be similar across variants, and the severity depends more on a person's immunity and overall health than on which variant causes infection. Symptoms can include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting and diarrhea.

Although CDC recently changed its guidelines and no longer gives an exact number of days you should isolate when you have COVID, the basic guidance remains the same:

If you are sick, stay home and away from others

- Call your healthcare provider for testing and treatment, especially if you are at higher risk for severe illness
- If you need testing and treatment but do not have a **provider**, please call Ledge Light Health District at 860.448.4882, option 2

Wait at least 24 hours after your fever goes away (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and you start to feel better overall to return to normal activities

- Not everyone with COVID has a fever. Pay attention to ALL symptoms and wait 24 hours after you start to feel better overall before you return to normal activities.
- Fever-reducing medications include acetaminophen, ibuprofen, aspirin, and naproxen

When you return to normal activities, for at least 5 days take added precautions including:

- Wearing a mask
- Keeping distance from others
- Improving ventilation (open windows for fresh air, gather outdoors when possible)
- Enhancing hygiene (wash your hands, cover your coughs and sneezes)
- Cleaning high-touch surfaces

A top priority is to ensure that people who get infected with COVID-19 have access to medical attention including antivirals which can reduce the chance of severe illness and death from COVID. If you need help accessing these treatments please reach out as soon as possible as they should be started within the first five days of illness. Resting during an infection and taking antivirals can also reduce the possibility of long-term COVID-19 symptoms, such as fatigue, shortness of breath, and cognitive dysfunction. These symptoms can be exhausting and debilitating, affecting everyday function for extended periods. When thinking about COVID prevention it is crucial not to overlook the basics. Poor ventilation can increase the risk of respiratory virus transmission, particularly when these viruses are transferred through the air and from person to person like COVID is. It is recommended to wear a well-fitting mask in crowded or poorly ventilated areas to reduce the likelihood that you will contract COVID.

Finally, remember staying up to date on COVID-19 vaccines helps to protect against severe illness and death. 95% of the people who were hospitalized with COVID at the end of 2023 had not received the updated 2023 vaccine and more than 70% of them had not received the 2022 version! Everyone 6 months and up are encouraged to get a COVID vaccination and the recommended updates. We can provide free COVID vaccinations for children ages 6-18 and for adults who are uninsured or underinsured and we can help everyone find a vaccination regardless of your age or insurance status. Please contact us if you need assistance, masks, test kits, or more information.

Maria Munar Gonzalez, mmunargonzalez@llhd.org



**RENEW YOUR IMMUNITY! FIND A COVID-19 VACCINE CLINIC NEAR YOU
VISIT OUR WEBSITE LLHD.ORG**

Community Safety Action Team

Ledge Light Health District recently received a grant from Connecticut Children’s Hospital in partnership with Connecticut Department of Public Health to administer a violence prevent/interruption project in the City of New London. For this three-year grant we will be partnering with Hearing Youth Voices, the Yale School of Public Health, many different community organizations and most importantly community members to understand more about violence and develop tailored interventions that support holistic wellbeing and safety for everyone in the community. On January 24th more than 60 people gathered for the first meeting of the Community Safety Action Team and had the opportunity to share their perspectives on safety in the community. At the end of March we gathered again to hear more from the young people in

New London about their experiences of safety and their ideas for moving forward. We also met with community members from two neighborhoods where there have been recent incidents of gun fire to hear about their experiences and brainstorm solutions.

In addition to talking with a lot more community members to understand multiple perspectives and connecting people with resources and supports through our Community Health Worker team, we’ll be launching a series of community trainings on everything from conflict resolution to restorative practices to understanding more about othering and belonging. Please join us! **Stephanye Clarke, sclarke@llhd.org**



New London community members gather for the first meeting of the Community Safety Action Team, January 2024

Blizzard Bash at Groton Community Center and Wellness Hub

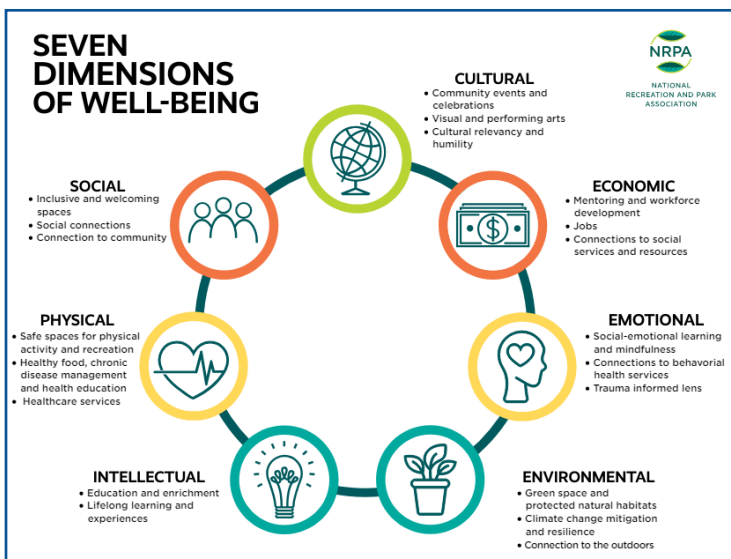
Ledge Light Health District is honored to have a long and meaningful partnership with Groton Parks and Recreation which has grown deeper over the last year thanks in part to a grant from the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) that supported our work to develop the Groton Community Center into a wellness hub. In January Ledge Light joined Groton Parks and Recreation and numerous other partners to showcase resources and information that support health and wellbeing at the “Blizzard Bash” – a fun event that included nutrition information, vaccination, exercise demonstrations and so much more!

Looking ahead, LLHD and Groton Parks and Recreation will continue to partner to bring programs

and services that address what NRPA calls “The Seven Dimensions of Wellbeing” to the Wellness Hub. From supporting physical health through vaccinations and blood pressure screenings to supporting cultural health through Women between Cultures classes to supporting economic health through connections to food and resources, we are committed to helping everyone achieve well-being!
Veronica Mallqui, vmallqui@llhd.org



LLHD Health Program Coordinator Veronica Mallqui shared an easy and nutritious recipe with Blizzard Bash attendees. LLHD also provided vaccinations and information about community health worker and other program supports.



The NRPA Seven Dimensions of Well-Being provides the foundation for our work at the Groton Wellness Hub. <https://www.nrpa.org/globalassets/seven-dimensions-of-well-being-infographic-updated.pdf>

Women Between Cultures Celebrates Two Years!

On Friday March 1st Women Between Cultures celebrated two years with an evening of inspiring testimony, amazing dancing and delicious food. Since it started two years ago, the program has looked to make a positive difference in the lives of immigrant women and connect them with resources, training, and community. Participants in the program are now ready to help in case of an emergency thanks to CPR, First Aid, Stop the Bleed, Shelter and Overdose Response trainings; they volunteer at several food distributions; they share their talents for arts and crafts with hospitals and nursing homes; they highlight their cultures and contributions to our community; and they advocate for awareness to issues of concern including domestic violence. Thanks in part to funding from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, Women Between Cultures is growing and expanding into its third year!

**Lizbeth Polo-Smith, lpolosmith@llhd.org
Amparo Bustamante, abustamante@llhd.org**



New London Mayor Michael Passero celebrates the two year anniversary with LLHD Community Health Workers and Women between Cultures leaders Lizbeth Polo-Smith and Amparo Bustamante.

Health Improvement Collaborative, New London Human Services Network and Eastern Connecticut Health Collaborative Partner for Speak Up! Train Up! Lift Up! Advocacy Training Day

Around our community you will find organizations and community members coming together to solve complex issues and advance community health. Three 'multi-sector collaboratives' have recently deepened their partnership, bringing together their members to host an advocacy training at Mitchell College this January. Attendees deepened their understanding of advocacy and collective impact through workshops facilitated by Health

Equity Solutions and Roosevelt Smith and were able to develop partnerships through the bringing together of the three groups. LLHD staff planned and participated in the day and were energized by the sense of collaboration and hope in the room. We're already planning part two!

Stephanye Clarke, sclarke@llhd.org



Community members and organizations gather at Mitchell College for the January 24th Speak Up! Train Up! Lift Up! Advocacy training.

Happy “Knight-iversary”

We celebrate and acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the LLHD team members! Each one of the “Ledge Light Knights” is an integral part of our team working with each other and community partners to promote healthy communities.

February

Mary Day, 4 years
Karl Jennings, 6 years
Lizbeth Polo-Smith, 3 years

March

Michael Bibens, 9 years
Catherine Dragoo, 20 years
Joshua Henry, 1 year
Veronica Mallqui, 1 year
Jennifer Muggeo, 19 years
Brigid White, 6 years

LLHD Cosmetology Updates

On March 14, the LLHD Board of Directors held a public hearing regarding proposed changes to our cosmetology regulation. We are so grateful for the time and effort so many business owners and operators shared with us—dialogue with the businesses we regulate is crucial to assuring that requirements support public health and safety in the most effective way possible. We made changes to two sections in the regulation based on feedback received; the final version is available on our website. **Katie Baldwin, kbaldwin@llhd.org**

What do you want to know about? Got an idea for a topic our next newsletter should cover? Email Estelle Harrison at eharrison@llhd.org!

The Place for CommUNITY Wellbeing

Something new is happening at the old American Legion building in New London! LLHD and partners on the Health Improvement Collaborative are working to bring multiple resources, programs and events to the new Place for CommUNITY Wellbeing (affectionately known as “The Place”). From vaccinations to food distributions to trainings and conversations, we hope that everyone in the community will find something that helps them achieve their individual health and well-being goals at The Place.

Since opening in January, The Place has been home to the weekly Food to People food program and regular trainings and events for Women between Cultures. Meetings and community conversations have included the FRESH New London Soups & Stories gathering, Community Safety Action Team meetings, a public hearing on LLHD regulations, and more! Look for regular hours for the LLHD public health nursing team and community health workers this month in addition to more community events—check our website and social media! **Jennifer Muggeo, jmuggeo@llhd.org**

Members of Spencer Lancaster Sr’s family gather at the Ribbon Cutting for The Place. The meeting room at The Place is named in honor of Mr. Lancaster’s leadership and contributions to our community.



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Get our newsletter and important updates sent directly to your inbox.
Email Estelle Harrison at eharrison@llhd.org.

