

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



Promote. Preserve. Protect.

A Message from the Health Officer

Dear Howard County Residents and Partners:

The Howard County Health Department (HCHD) is pleased to present its 2020 Annual Report in a year that has been like no other in recent memory, not just for the public health community, but for everyone. While we were faced with new challenges and a serious pandemic, our goal of delivering high quality core public health services that promote, preserve and protect our community has never wavered.

COVID-19 has affected our lives in ways that we could not have imagined one year ago and I am proud of the way HCHD and our community have responded. Along with County Executive Ball, state and local partners, we have come together in Howard County to respond to this pandemic. Our team of clinical staff, public health nurses, contact tracers, outbreak managers, health educators, communicators, administrators and enforcement team have worked around the clock to assess, plan and execute a plan to keep Howard County healthy.

While many HCHD resources, along with other County services, were reassigned to the COVID-19 response, the day-to-day responsibilities of the Health Department to the community continued. We were able to transfer many critical services online and make modifications to our building to ensure that necessary services could safely resume for those needing in-person attention. Most of our staff continue to work remotely without disruption to client services.

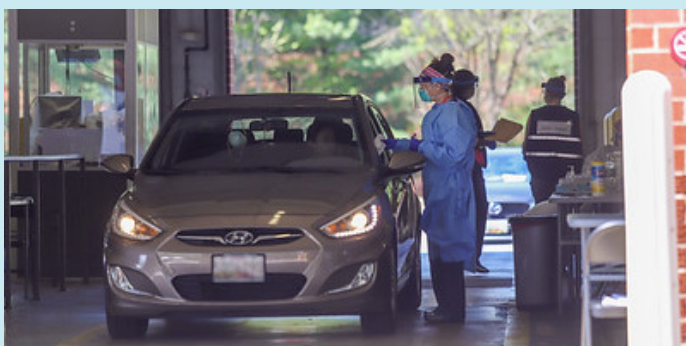
As we look forward to 2021, there is still much work to be done to restore our health and return to normal. The arrival of a COVID-19 vaccine is heartening and our work has already begun to ensure timely, safe and equitable distribution of this vaccine to our community. I encourage anyone looking for up-to-date information about our ongoing response to this pandemic to follow us on social media or visit our website at www.hchealth.org.

Maura J. Rossman, MD
Health Officer



COVID-19 Response Efforts

- **Sourced and purchased PPE** to supply to County providers, ensuring ongoing safe health care during early COVID-19 response. Helped providers locate PPE sources and **provided guidance regarding use and conservation**.
- Led **County Joint Information System** to support integrated communications on COVID-19; **Collaborated with local partners to launch COVID-related social media campaigns** to expand reach and draw in a diverse audience, including “Why I Wear my Mask” and holiday safety messaging.



- **Provided daily updates to County COVID-19 dashboard** to ensure County leadership, local partners and the public had access to the most up-to-date data about the pandemic.
- Established a virtual phone bank in response to rising COVID-19 crisis. **Staff responded to over 5,000 calls** from residents, healthcare providers and businesses since March.
- **Operated a COVID-19 testing location at the Columbia VEIP site**, performing more than 6,700 tests over six months.

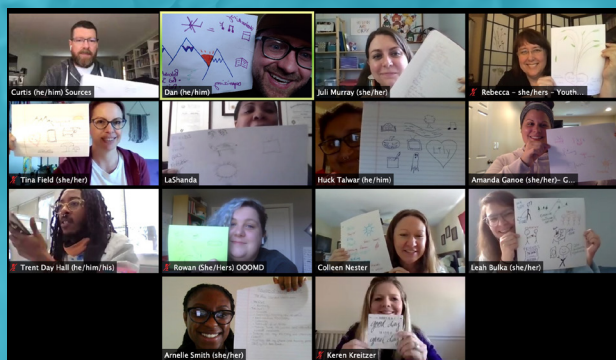
- **Human Resources onboarded 75 new hires with 50 being for COVID-19, which is approximately 22% of our current workforce.** This increased the Health Department's capacity to respond to the pandemic. New hires focused on contact tracing, testing and vaccination.
- Created Advisory, Notice of Intent and Compliance Forms to help enforce the Governor's Executive Orders. **Responded to nearly 1,300 complaints and other COVID-19 inquiries** regarding mask use, social distancing, cleaning procedures, and other related issues.
- **Conducted field investigations of non-compliance with the Governor's Executive Orders for food and non-food businesses,** especially in cases of recurring concerns or potential COVID-19 employee outbreaks.
- **Created strategic partnerships** with the Foreign-Born Information & Referral Network (FIRN), Howard County General Hospital, faith-based communities, etc. **for education, outreach, testing and other services to address community need.**

Maintaining Daily Operations During COVID-19

When the State of Emergency was announced by Governor Hogan in March, HCHD quickly transitioned services to a virtual and/or no-contact format. In July, HCHD re-opened for in-person services in a building that was reconfigured to ensure safe and healthy protocols were in place for staff and clients. Additionally, HCHD initiated new telehealth services in order to reach our community.

Behavioral Health

- Year two of Howard County Sources of Strength Program (best practice youth suicide prevention project) was transitioned to a virtual format to allow this peer leadership program to continue. **11 adult advisors worked with 45 high school students** to share messages with youth to prevent suicide, bullying and substance misuse.



- **Launched online Overdose Response Program (ORP) trainings and mail delivery Narcan** (first Health Department in the state) to reduce barriers to obtaining services; **increased distribution of Detera** medical disposal pouches to mitigate drug misuse risk during COVID-19.



Health Services

- In-person health services were largely transitioned online to ensure safety. **WIC program served over 3,600 participants remotely while TB Program treated 13 active cases via video platform.**

Environmental Health

- **Completed two year transition to a new inspection management platform.** This ensures a more stable web-based product that is readily accessible from any location with internet/cellular service.

Population Health

- **Maintained Nurse Monitoring and outbreak investigations** while staff were also dedicated to COVID-19 response. Health Education staff transitioned outreach efforts to focus on COVID-19 in response to community needs.

Access to Care

- Virtual communications were used to ensure clients had access to health insurance during the pandemic. By making this transition, **the rate of clients who could not be contacted dropped from 6% to 2%.**

- Launched expanded Harm Reduction and Syringe Services programming and the “Let’s Talk About Mental Health” campaign to respond to rising overdose death rates and mental health concerns in the community related to COVID-19.



- Created series of 10 Behavioral Health and COVID-19 Resource and Response webinars for providers and stakeholders in partnership with the Local Health Improvement Coalition.

Moving Forward

Mass Vaccination Planning & Administration

- In preparation for the mass vaccination effort, HCHD developed vaccination clinic plans, identified vaccination sites, purchased ultra-cold freezers, conducted trainings, hired vaccinators, recruited volunteers and developed communication messages for the community. Vaccine was delivered and the first vaccination clinics were launched at the end of December, vaccinating first responders, vaccinators and non-hospital healthcare workers.



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2020 HCHD COVID-19 Response at a Glance

PPE

PPE Distribution Pick-ups	715
Pieces of PPE Distributed	917,146

Case Investigation & Contact Tracing

Facility Outbreak Responses	176
Total COVID-19 Tests Conducted in Howard County	148,766
COVID-19 Positive Cases & Contacts Reached by Contact Tracers	14,020
COVID-19 Fatalities (Howard County)	191

Enforcement

Orders Issued to Abate Violations to the Governor’s Executive Orders	15
Enforcement Investigations	1,298
Formal Advisory Letters Issued to Businesses	161

Community Outreach

COVID-19 Sanitation & Education Kits Distributed to the Community	840
Facilitation of Education & Panel Discussions Related to COVID-19	24
Email Requests Received	1,200+
Calls Received to Phone Bank	5,000
Total Reach of COVID posts (FB)	1,668,270
Total Reach of COVID posts (TW)	584,619

2020 HCHD Daily Operations at a Glance

Health Services

Seasonal Flu Vaccinations	2,300
Hearing & Vision Screenings	10,432
Child Immunizations Provided	1,169
% Increase in Annual Ambulance Pick-ups	50%
MCHP Applications Processed	28,332

Behavioral Health

Deterra Bags Distributed	4,200
Naloxone Supplied to Opioid Treatment Providers	3,806

