

Declining Public Health Funding Creates Increasing Health Risks for Our Community

As we start 2009, many of us are initiating goals and resolutions for the year ahead in hopes of “raising the bar” on the previous year’s accomplishments and setting expectations for future successes—both personally and professionally. In the case of the El Paso County Department of Health and Environment, funding cuts at the county level have reached a point where our “bar” must be lowered in terms of the number and level of core public health programs and services we provide. The combined reductions of county funding (\$2.3 million) and deficit spending (\$2.7 million) totals \$5 million since 2002. Subsequently, we have had to eliminate many important public health services in the community to offset these huge budget shortfalls.

Health Department Reorganization for 2009

The following public health services will be reduced, suspended or closed in 2009:

- **Air Quality:** Monitoring indexes, facility inspections, new construction planning—eliminated.
- **Water Quality:** Rural non-community ground water system inspections—eliminated. Swimming pool/spa inspections and regulation enforcement—eliminated.
- **Solid Waste Management:** Follow-up response to complaints regarding household trash, animal waste and foreclosed property health hazards—eliminated.
- **Vector/Zoonoses:** West Nile virus surveillance, reporting and testing—eliminated. Surveillance and testing of rodents for plague—eliminated. Hantavirus and rabies investigations and testing—limited.
- **School Safety Education and Regulation Enforcement:** Sanitation, science rooms, chemical storage and general safety—eliminated.
- **Child Care Inspections:** Sanitation and facility safety compliance—eliminated. Complaint follow-ups—limited to high-risk diseases or outbreaks.
- **STD Surveillance and Investigations:** Local health department investigation of reported infections and contacts—eliminated.
- **Temporary Event Food Vendor Inspections:** Planning, training and regulating—suspended.
- **New Operating Days/Hours:** Effective January 5, 2009, the Health Department will be open Monday—Thursday (closed Fridays), with extended operating hours from 7 AM to 6 PM.

Impact on Our Community Health Partners

These service reductions translate to higher risk for the spread of infectious diseases given our inability to respond to public health concerns throughout our community. However, the Health Department will be fully engaged in public health communications via emergency public health notices, health care provider consultations, website resources, local media and continued alliances with our community partners.

The El Paso County Department of Health and Environment remains committed to our principal mission: “To protect and promote public health and environmental quality in our community through people, prevention and partnerships.” Now more than ever, the “partnerships” component is essential to accomplish this mission. Thank you for your continued support and collaboration to ensure a healthier and safer community!

We will provide more detailed information about these changes in future publications. Please visit our website at www.elpasocountyhealth.org in the meantime.

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