

Making El Paso County Healthier Begins With You!

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One individual CAN make a difference for the better! When individuals work together to make a difference, they can be even more powerful!

That truth is at the heart of this year's National Public Health Week, April 5-11, sponsored by the American Public Health Association. "A Healthier America, One Community at a Time" is the theme, and we know it well at the El Paso County Department of Health and Environment.

Our employees have been reminded what a difference they make during the last year as they mounted the first communitywide response to a flu pandemic in modern history. Our employees put on five large community vaccination clinics and supplied medical providers and pharmacies with vaccine—in total, more than 165,000 doses were provided in the community through mid-January.

The Health Department's massive effort to limit and reduce the spread of H1N1 flu in our community—aided greatly by many individuals and organizations—was possible because of the preparation we have been doing for the last several years. Our focus has been to plan and prepare for public health emergencies—from bioterrorism to pandemics to natural disasters—and to train and equip our employees to protect the public in such emergencies.

In fact, just before the H1N1 flu pandemic emerged, our emergency preparedness and response efforts were honored by the National Association of County and City Health Officials and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Only 158 out of about 3,000 local health departments nationwide have earned the designation "Project Public Health Ready," and our health department was one of them!

Of course, the most important reward for our efforts was being better prepared to protect our community. Responding successfully to public health emergencies is just one example of the many steps we all can take to make our community and our country healthier. It starts with us taking responsibility as individuals—no one can improve our health or our family's health for us—and it calls on us to work together to achieve our community goals.

But where do you start? Start with something you can control yourself. Educate yourself about what you could be doing to improve your health and the health of your family. You can start by getting healthy tips from our Web site, www.elpasocountyhealth.org. Start by taking small, realistic steps to set yourself up for success. Then spread the word—share what you find out with friends, co-workers and neighbors. Join with others who are trying to make a difference.

This is an ideal opportunity for you to start to make a difference in your community if you're not already involved. Friends, neighbors and co-workers may already know of some issues—do some people in your group smoke or use tobacco, for example? Why not sponsor a friendly and healthy, competition to quit smoking together? Here's an easy one: Why not increase your activity levels together—take walks together as a group!

Here are some simple steps you can take to protect your health and the health of people around you:

- Update your adult vaccinations and those of children in your household. Talk to your health care provider about updating your vaccinations, and visit the Health Department's Web site to get immunization schedules for children and adults.
- Prepare at home for emergencies, such as blizzards and other storms, natural disasters such as floods, and disease emergencies such as pandemics. We have many resources to get you started on our Web site, including brochures, checklists and more.
- Wash your hands, frequently and correctly. Washing your hands is the single most important thing you can do to protect your health.

Remember, as we celebrate National Public Health Week, we have a lot of information to help you improve your health on our Web site, www.elpasocountyhealth.org.