

# Public Health Notes

Volume 9 Issue 1

January-February 2014

*NH DHHS Mission Statement: To join communities and families in providing opportunities for citizens to achieve health and independence.*

## Staying Safe and Healthy This Winter

Winter comes the same time every year, but sometimes we are still unprepared. Here are some important steps you and your loved ones can take to help keep you safe and healthy through the cold and snow this year.

### Your Home

Carbon monoxide is a real danger in the home. It is a colorless, odorless gas that results from incompletely burned fossil fuels, i.e., wood, oil, propane, and coal. Carbon monoxide can be deadly, first causing drowsiness, confusion, headache, and weakness that may progress to nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and loss of consciousness. People who are asleep or intoxicated can die from CO poisoning before they even experience symptoms.



### Weather and Travel

It is easy to underestimate the effects of cold weather when you are outside or traveling. A broken down car can leave you stranded with no source of heat, for

### Important Dates

*January is Cervical Cancer Screening Month*

National Cervical Cancer Coalition

[www.nccc-online.org](http://www.nccc-online.org)

*January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month*

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation

[www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com)

*January 5-11 is National Folic Acid Awareness Week*

National Council on Folic Acid

<http://folicacidinfo.org/index.php>

*January 19-25 is Healthy Weight Week*

Healthy Weight Network

[www.healthyweightnetwork.com](http://www.healthyweightnetwork.com)

*February is American Heart Month*

American Heart Association

[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

*February is National Children's Dental Health Month*

American Dental Association

[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)

*February is National Cancer Prevention Month*

American Cancer Society

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

*February 1 is National Wear Red Day*

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

[www.hearttruth.gov](http://www.hearttruth.gov)

example, so always dress appropriately and have an emergency kit in your car with a flashlight and batteries, food that lasts such as granola bars, water, jumper cables, blanket, radio, cat litter or sand (to add traction in slippery conditions), ice scraper, shovel, cell phone with charger if you have one, and flares. Also consider pet food if you are traveling with a pet and extra dia-



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pers and baby food if you have a young child.

Some other tips are to keep your gas tank at least half full to help prevent ice in the lines and in case a storm comes that knocks out the power, since gas station pumps require electricity. Also, check the tread on your tires to make sure they are sufficient for the conditions.

## Your Health

Cold can cause serious problems and lead to hypothermia and frostbite if it persists too long. Read more about cold weather injuries at <http://www.cdc.gov/features/WorkingInCold/>. Always dress for the weather; if it is very cold, wear layers, including a hat, gloves, and waterproof boots if you're going to be spending time outdoors.

Accidents are also a big concern in the winter. Before using a chain saw or snow blower be sure to read the instructions on how to use them properly and follow all safety guidelines.

To read more about winter preparedness, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/features/winterweather/> or [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

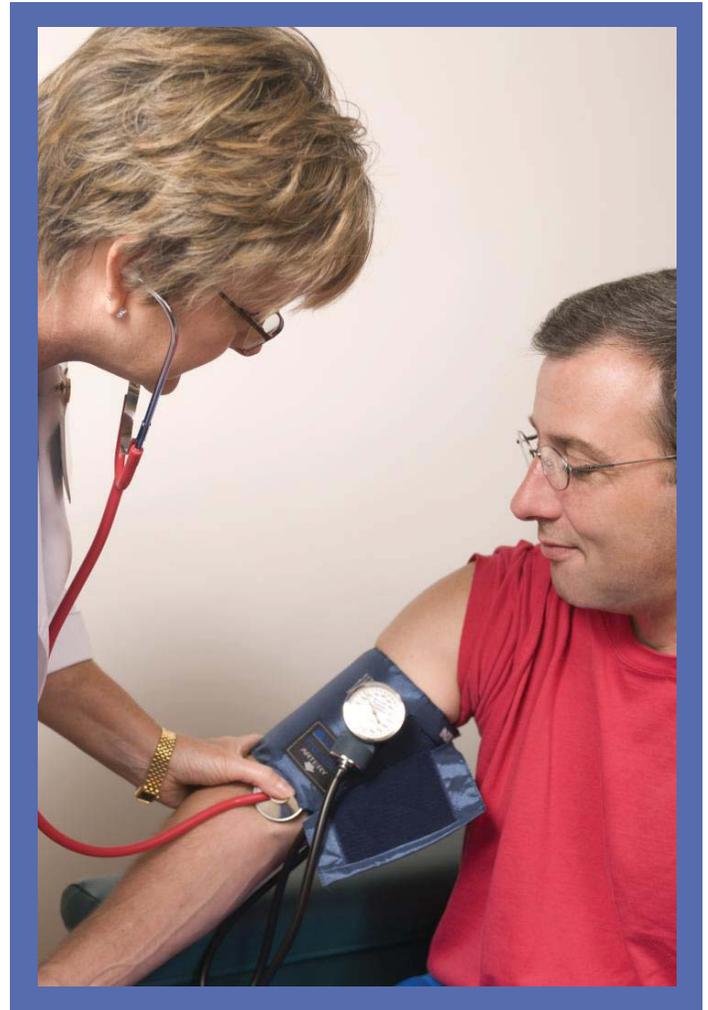
## American Heart Month/Wear Red Day

February is American Heart Month, a time to reflect on the steps we all should take to keep our heart healthy. Heart disease is a major problem. Every year, about 715,000 Americans have a heart attack. About 600,000 people die from heart disease in the United States each year—that's 1 out of every 4 deaths. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women.

Million Hearts is a national initiative with the goal of preventing 1 million heart attacks and strokes nationwide by 2017. For more information go to [www.millionhearts.hhs.gov](http://www.millionhearts.hhs.gov).

Some of the risk factors for heart disease and stroke are poor diet, lack of exercise, being overweight, high blood cholesterol, eating too much sodium, and having high blood pressure. So what can you do to reduce your risk and improve your health? First, speak with

your healthcare provider to learn your numbers. Quit smoking if you use tobacco products. Exercise more and eat a diet low in saturated fat, sugar, and processed foods. Consume more fruits and vegetables and get enough sleep. Learn more at <http://www.cdc.gov/features/heartmonth/>.



## New Hampshire Gets Highest Score in Outbreak Preparedness Evaluation

The Trust for America's Health (TFAH) recently released an assessment report of the states' readiness to deal with a disease outbreak entitled *Outbreaks: Protecting Americans from Infectious Diseases*. New Hampshire received a score of 8 out of 10 on the indicators analyzed, the highest score of any state and the only one to achieve it. The states received either a

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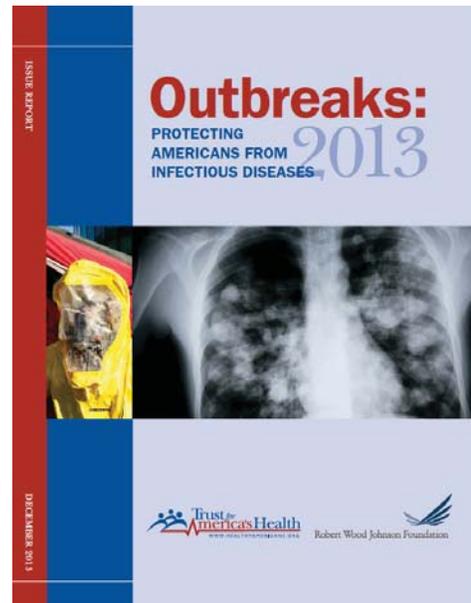
yes or no on the preparedness measures. The majority of states (34) scored 5 or lower out of 10 key indicators.

This is the TFAH's annual preparedness-related report, but unlike "Ready or Not" reports of the past 10 years, this and future reports will focus on the analysis of key national preparedness policy issues rather than measuring and issuing state-specific scores against determined indicators. New Hampshire received a score of 7 out of 10 in 2012. The 2011 report did not rank states but looked at funding and budget cuts. This year's report looks at 10 measures that are related to public health preparedness, but are not the same indicators from year to year. This analysis offers a good snapshot of where the states are in infectious disease prevention and control, rather than a measure of year-over-year improvement.

"I am very pleased with our score," said Dr. José Montero, Director of Public Health at DHHS, "and all the hard work our staff and partners have done and the strides we have made in improving our preparedness around infectious diseases since 9/11, but there is always room for improvement. We never know when the next outbreak will strike or what it will be: influenza, MERS-CoV, meningitis, hepatitis, bioterrorism, or something else. Fighting existing and emerging infectious diseases requires constant vigilance."

There were two areas where New Hampshire received a "no" score. The first was the vaccination of 90% of children 19–39 months of age with four doses of DTaP, for which New Hampshire achieved 88.7% in 2012. The second was the immunization of 50% of the population against influenza, and during the 2012–13 season 59.2% of children 6 months to 17 years and 46.1% of adults were vaccinated in the State. The *Outbreaks* report provides recommendations that address many of the major gaps in infectious disease control and prevention states are experiencing, including:

- Strengthening fundamental capabilities – maintaining an expert workforce and giving them state-of-the-art tools required to conduct investigations to quickly detect, control, and treat disease outbreaks;
- Countering antibiotic resistance and prioritizing research and development of



medical countermeasures should be top health and national security priorities;

- Increasing the number of Americans receiving recommended vaccinations and routine screenings for particular diseases, since these are the safest and most effective ways to reduce infectious diseases in the United States;
- Enhancing disease surveillance and ensuring public health laboratories have the equipment and capacity to not only test for common problems such as foodborne illnesses but also for new and large-scale threats such as bioterrorism or a pandemic;
- Improving global coordination to prevent and contain emerging new illnesses such as MERS-CoV while maintaining defenses against "old-school" threats such as malaria and tuberculosis; and
- Shoring up the nation's public health preparedness capabilities to respond to major disease outbreaks or acts of bioterrorism to ensure new threats can be rapidly identified and contained.

To read the entire report, go to <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/outbreaks2013/>. For more information about any of the issues addressed, visit the NH Department of Health and Human Services website at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov>.

## New Hampshire Fifth Healthiest State According to New Study

The 2013 version of the United Health Foundation’s America’s Health Rankings report gives the State of New Hampshire an overall fifth-place ranking among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. This year’s report looks at various health indicators, such as obesity and smoking rates, including some new measurements for the first time, such as deaths from substance abuse, disparity in health status, and dental care.

Last year New Hampshire was ranked third initially, then changes to the model and how rankings were calculated was revised by the United Health Foundation, so the State dropped to fifth. New Hampshire is generally a healthy state by most measures. Some highlights from this year’s report are that in the past year smoking prevalence decreased from 19.4% to 17.2% in New Hampshire; over the past 10 years the high school graduation rate has improved from 75.3% to 86.3%; and in the past 10 years the rate of cardiovascular deaths decreased by 42% from 310.0 to 218.9 per 100,000 population.

Not all measures are positive in the State though, with the percentage of children living in poverty increasing in the past 10 years from 6.5% to 10.9%, a high prevalence of binge drinking, and a high rate of pertussis infections.

“We are lucky to be living in such a healthy state,” said Dr. José Montero, Public Health Director at DHHS, “but there is more work to be done. Our immunization rate among children is second in the country, but it is not acceptable that we are seeing a busy year for cases of whooping cough. We still struggle too with a fairly high rate of obesity and diabetes as well as



youth tobacco use. These cross-cutting issues require comprehensive approaches with appropriate and clearly identified strategies and funding, so we can successfully continue to work tirelessly on behalf of our population.”

Our health is the result of a combination of many factors, some within our control and some not. America’s Health Rankings analyzes a comprehensive set of behaviors, public and health policies, environmental conditions, and clinical data from the states to calculate an overall view of the health of the country. The report is based on the perspective that, in addition to our individual genetic predisposition to disease, healthiness is based on the interaction of four essential and controllable factors: everyday activities that affect our health; the daily conditions in which we live; the availability of resources to promote and maintain health; and the clinical care we receive at physicians’ offices, clinics, and hospitals.

To read the entire report, visit [www.americashealthrankings.org](http://www.americashealthrankings.org). For more information about any of the issues addressed, visit the NH Department of Health and Human Services website at [www.dhhs.nh.gov](http://www.dhhs.nh.gov).

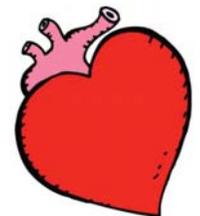
## Heart Attack? Know the Warning Signs

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, contributing to one in every three deaths each year. Heart disease is also the number one killer of women in the United States.

The first step toward surviving a heart attack is learning to recognize the symptoms. The most common signs of a heart attack in both women and men are listed below.

**Unusually heavy pressure on the chest, like there’s a ton of weight on you.** Most heart attacks involve chest pain or discomfort in the center of or the left side of the chest, which usually lasts for more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back. It may even feel like heartburn or like indigestion.

**Sharp upper body pain in the neck, back, and/or jaw.** This symptom can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, shoulders, neck, jaw, or



upper part of the stomach (not below the belly button). Pain in the back, neck, or jaw is a more common heart attack symptom for women than it is for men.

**Severe shortness of breath.** This symptom can come on suddenly. It may occur while you are at rest or with minimal physical activity. You may struggle to breathe or try taking deep breaths. Shortness of breath may start before or at the same time as chest pain or discomfort and can even be your only symptom.

**Cold sweats, and you know it's not menopause.** Unexplained or excessive sweating or breaking out into a "cold sweat" can be a sign of a heart attack.

**Unusual or unexplained fatigue (tiredness).** Sudden and unusual tiredness, sleepiness, or lack of energy is one of the most common symptoms of heart attack in women, and one of the easiest to ignore. It can come on suddenly or be present for days. More than half of women having a heart attack experience muscle tiredness or weakness that is not related to exercise.

**Unexplained nausea (feeling sick to the stomach) or vomiting.** Women are twice as likely as men to experience nausea, vomiting, or indigestion during their heart attack. These feelings are often written off as having a less serious cause. Remember, nausea and vomiting may be signs that something is seriously wrong, especially if you have other symptoms.

If you or someone you know has any one of these symptoms and it lasts for more than five minutes, call 9-1-1 for emergency medical care. Even if your symptoms go away in less than five minutes, call your doctor right away—it could be sign that a heart attack is coming soon. ***Don't waste time trying home remedies or waiting for the feelings to pass on their own. Remember, quick treatment can save a life!***

The risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, being overweight, having a poor diet, lack of physical activity, and diabetes.

You can lower your risk of heart disease by eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, being tobacco-free, limiting alcohol use, and managing any medical condition you might have under the direction of your health care provider.

For more information, visit the following websites:

The NH Department of Health and Human Services, Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program [www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdpc/hdsp.htm](http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdpc/hdsp.htm) or call 1-800-852-3345, ext. 4931; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov/heartdisease](http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease); or the American Heart Association at [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org).

## New Year's Health Resolutions

It is the time of year for New Year's resolutions and people most often make them about improving their health—losing weight, exercising more, and quitting smoking as examples. It is important to remember that not everything works for everybody; people are different.

For losing weight and exercising more, studies have shown that people do better at losing if they set smaller milestones, such as adding more walking for a week, then also taking the stairs more the second week, and going to the gym more the third week and so on. Remember that any improvement is a step in the right direction. They say it takes at least two weeks for something to truly become a new habit, so be patient.

If you are looking to improve your diet, try eating a vegetable with every meal or eliminating one sugary treat per day to start. Then gradually make other changes, such as switching to non-sugary drinks or giving up cream in your coffee to cut calories. The little things start to add up.

If you need to quit tobacco, try getting help. The DHHS Division of Public Health Services is offering free nicotine replacement therapy, in the form of the patch, to New Hampshire residents who want to quit smoking or chewing tobacco in the New Year. Two good resources to help people quit are [www.TryToStopNH.org](http://www.TryToStopNH.org) and 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669), where any New Hampshire resident can get free advice, counseling, support, and while supplies last, free patches.

Also, try finding a buddy to make a change with you. If you have someone to help support you and make it fun, your chances of success are better. Here's to a Healthy and Happy New Year!

