

# OVERSEEING THE HEALTH OF THE PUBLIC

Volume 2, Issue 1

January, 2011

As local Board of Health members, you have a critical role in overseeing the health of the public. The policy direction and leadership you provide will help us achieve the state vision of healthy people in healthy communities. This newsletter from the Wisconsin Division of Public Health (DPH) is provided as a resource to you in this role.

## Health Officer Highlights



Dr. Henry  
Anderson, MD,  
WI State Health  
Officer

Happy New Year to all Board of Health members in Wisconsin. As the State Health Officer, I commend you for your work. While our state, nation, and likely your local jurisdiction are facing challenges, I hope that you are finding some opportunities to build a strong local public health system. With the change in administration in our Department of Health Services, I am currently acting as the State Health Officer. My responsibilities as State Health Officer are outlined in statute. I am appointed by the Secretary of the Department of Health Services to “develop public health policy for the state and direct public health programs” (s. 250.01(9)). You have a similar role at the local level. I hope that I can connect with you to support the work you do at a local level to prevent disease and promote health. Please feel free to connect with me or the Regional Office Director in your region if you have any questions. I can be reached at [henry.anderson@wisconsin.gov](mailto:henry.anderson@wisconsin.gov) and the regional office directors can be reached at <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth/counties/regional.htm>. This newsletter, as well as the Board website, <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth/BOHInformation/index.htm>, are also a resource to you as you do your jobs. As we start 2011, know that we anticipate considerable focus on the state health plan priorities identified in [Healthiest Wisconsin 2020](#), as well as efforts to look at performance management, accreditation, and quality improvement for health departments. We look forward to collaborating closely with you to reach a healthier Wisconsin.

Dr. Henry Anderson, Wisconsin State Health Officer

## Public Health Capacity and Quality

Board of Health members assure that local public health priorities are addressed by looking at the capacity and quality of your department. The new state health plan, [Healthiest Wisconsin 2020](#), has identified a focus area that addresses this issue. By 2020, the plan identifies that all Wisconsin health departments will implement established quality improvement (QI) processes, and that all departments will be accredited. What does this mean for you and what resources are available? The National Association of Local Boards of Health (NALBOH) has identified QI and accreditation as critical efforts for boards to undertake. In a recent position statement they state that boards “have a legal obligation to ensure that the agency it oversees operates efficiently and effectively as stewards of public funds, and that it meets the public health needs of the community it serves.” Wisconsin has been working hard to find ways to support local health departments in these efforts. For the past 3 years we have had a grant to improve QI readiness and accreditation preparation, the Wisconsin’s Public Health Quality Initiative (WIQI). Forty local health departments and over 250 public health staff have been involved. Recently, Wisconsin successfully competed for funding from CDC to continue some of these efforts. There are funds (\$300,000) available to support mini-grants for local health departments and tribes who are looking at performance improvement and accreditation. More information on these grants can be found at: [www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/rfp/DPH/G1692/index.htm](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/rfp/DPH/G1692/index.htm). As a board member, you are encouraged to learn more about how to build capacity and quality in your department. Contact the regional office for more information or visit NALBOH at <http://www.nalboh.org/PHA.htm>.

**Quote of the Month: “Good health and good sense are two of life’s greatest blessings.”**

**Publilius Syrus**

## Hand Washing: Do's and Don'ts

Frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading illness. Hand washing requires only soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer—a cleanser that doesn't require water.

### When to wash your hands:

As you touch people, surfaces and objects throughout the day, you accumulate germs on your hands. In turn, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Although it's impossible to keep your hands germ-free, washing your hands frequently can help limit the transfer of bacteria, viruses and other microbes.

**Always wash your hands before:** preparing food, eating, treating wounds or giving medicine, touching a sick or injured person, and inserting or removing contact lenses.

**Always wash your hands after:** preparing food, especially raw meat or poultry, using the toilet, changing a diaper, touching an animal or animal toys, leashes or waste, blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing into your hands, treating wounds, touching a sick or injured person, and handling garbage or something that could be contaminated, such as a cleaning cloth or soiled shoes.

### How to wash your hands:

- ◆ Wet your hands with running water.
- ◆ Apply liquid, bar or powder soap.
- ◆ Lather well.
- ◆ Rub your hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds. Remember to scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- ◆ Rinse well.
- ◆ Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel or air dryer.
- ◆ If possible, use your towel to turn off the faucet.

Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/hand-washing/HQ00407>

Another good source: <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/factsheets/Handwashing.htm>

**Board of Health Member resource:** Do you want more information on your role as a Board of Health member? Go to the website at <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth/BOHInformation/index.htm>. On this site are a variety of resources, training materials and contacts.

### Did You Know:

#### January is National Radon Action Month

- ◆ Radon is a radioactive gas released from the normal decay of uranium in rocks and soil.
- ◆ Radioactive particles from radon can damage cells that line the lungs and lead to lung cancer.
- ◆ Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and is associated with 15,000 to 22,000 lung cancer deaths each year.
- ◆ Studies showing a link between radon and lung cancer in humans include studies of underground uranium miners and of the general population exposed to radon in their homes.
- ◆ Testing is the only way to know if your home has elevated radon levels. Health authorities recommend radon testing and encourage corrective action when necessary.



For more information on Radon in Wisconsin go to: [http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph\\_beh/RadonProt/](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph_beh/RadonProt/)

For more information, contact your DPH Regional Office Director. Contact information available at: <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth/counties/regional.htm>