

February 2025

Health Officer's Update

It's February- a time to celebrate the season of love and hearts! We also ring in the year of the snake with Lunar New Year arriving Jan 29th. Time to shed bad energy and expect a year of transformation. And it is always a great time to reflect on our relationships and our health. Whether you're sharing the love with a special someone this Valentine's Day or showing care for yourself and those around you, there's no better moment to prioritize well-being.

We continue to monitor the spread of highly pathogenic H5N1 (Avian Influenza). There have been no human cases in Maryland, however, there is a backyard poultry flock in Gaithersburg that is presumed positive. The flock has been depopulated. The risk to humans remains low, however you should avoid interacting with dead birds and if you see dead wild birds, please report it to animal control by calling 311. If you think you may have been exposed, please contact your primary care provider for assessment.

We are in the peak of respiratory illness season. This year much of that is being driven by influenza. The Maryland Department of Health recently advised healthcare facilities to reinstitute masking for at least two weeks, until hospitalization rates drop. You should consider wearing a mask if you are visiting a hospital or doctor's office and take extra precaution in large indoor gatherings.

You may have heard of an increase in tuberculosis (TB) cases in Kansas. We have not seen an increase over baseline. However, Montgomery County does have some of the highest rates of TB in the area. We have a very robust [TB clinic](#) and provides blood testing, chest x-rays, and treatment for both active and latent TB. The TB clinic no longer provides TB skin testing.

While the Federal government has paused communications from many health organizations (CDC, FDA, HRSA, NIH) [Montgomery County](#) and the [State of Maryland](#) will continue to report key public health data that we have available. We are monitoring all the President's Executive Orders and their impact. Our commitment to serve everyone in our community remains strong.

This February, we not only celebrate love on Valentine's Day, but also recognize American Heart Month, Black History Month, and a series of key health awareness events that will help us all make heart-healthy choices, raise awareness about sexual health, and celebrate our collective heritage.

February is American Heart Month, a time to raise awareness about heart disease, the leading cause of death in the U.S. for both men and women. Men tend to develop heart problems at a younger age with symptoms of chest pain/pressure that radiates to the left arm or jaw, shortness of breath, cold sweats, nausea and dizziness. Women tend to have more subtle symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, persistent fatigue and may not have chest pain. High blood pressure, diabetes, and smoking increases the risk of heart disease in both women and men. Women also see an increase in heart disease risk after menopause when estrogen levels decline.

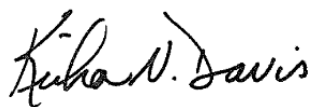
Valentine's Day is a great time to remind folks of the importance of condoms! National Condom Week is February 14th - 21st. Last year we saw a rise in syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections. Condoms are an essential part of sexual health, helping to protect individuals from unintended pregnancies and infections. It's a great time to educate the public on safe sex practices and provide resources for easy access to condoms.

February is also Black history month and a reminder of the health disparities that exist in this community in almost every area of health. The County remains committed to identifying and eliminating health disparities and addressing the systemic inequities that have caused them.

Here are some action steps Montgomery County residents can take in February:

- Participate in **National Wear Red Day** (February 2nd) to raise awareness about women's heart health.
- Join the African American Health Program in recognizing **National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day** on Feb 5th from 5-8pm at the Silver Spring Civic Center, register [here](#).
- Celebrate **National Condom Week** (February 14th- 21st) by promoting safe sex practices and condom accessibility.
- Support **Black History Month** by celebrating the accomplishments of Black individuals and advocating for health improvements in Black communities.

Let's work together this February to show love, raise awareness, foster prevention, and promote healthier communities for all. These are actions that can make our Montgomery County community a healthier, happier place to live, work, and play!



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