August is National Immunization Awareness Month, the perfect time to make sure children are up to date on their vaccines. Getting all of the recommended vaccines is one of the most important things parents can do to protect their children’s health.

When children are not vaccinated, they are at increased risk for disease and can spread disease to others in their classroom and community – including babies who are too young to be fully vaccinated, and people with weakened immune systems due to cancer and other health conditions. Schools are highly susceptible to outbreaks of infectious diseases.

“To avoid the long lines prior to the start of school, we are encouraging parents to bring their children in now for their vaccines,” said Dr. Christopher Perkins, DCHHS health authority and medical director.

Dallas County Health and Human Services is once again hosting back to school immunization clinics. The first off-site clinic was held July 20 at the Antioch Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church in Dallas, where Dr. Karry D. Wesley is the senior pastor.

This event marked the third year in a row that DCHHS and Antioch have partnered to host a school-related immunizations clinic. More than 120 people utilized the clinic.

“Once again, Pastor Wesley and his church have opened their doors to serve the community,” said DCHHS Director Zachary Thompson. “We commend Antioch Fellowship for their help in making this additional vaccination opportunity available for families whose children need these immunizations for school.”

DCHHS also participated in the Mayor’s Back-to-School Fair Aug. 1. From free school supplies for Dallas schoolchildren (who met specific eligibility requirements), to free health, dental and vision screenings, immunizations and haircuts, to the latest information on education, health and social services, the 17th-annual fair offered parents and children everything they need for the first day of school.

Additional DCHHS back-to-school immunization clinics were held at DeSoto High School Aug. 10 and at DCHHS Aug. 17. Immunizations are also given at each of the DCHHS clinic locations from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday–Friday. The immunization clinic, located in the DCHHS building on the first floor, is open until 6 p.m. on Wednesdays.

Additional DCHHS clinic locations include: 2377 N. Stemmons Freeway, Room 159 in Dallas; 3312 N. Buckner Boulevard, Suite 200 in Dallas; 1113 E. Jefferson Boulevard, Suite 200 in Dallas; 8202 Spring Valley Road, Suite 200 in Dallas; 440 South Nursery Road in Irving and 2774 Valwood Parkway in Farmers Branch. The North Dallas clinic is open on Mondays only.

Appointments aren’t necessary. The cost is $10 for the child’s first visit and $5 for returning patients. Waivers are given to families in need.
DCHHS, Walgreens and Greater Than AIDS Team up to Provide Free HIV Testing in Support of National HIV Testing Day

DCHHS, Abounding Prosperity, Inc., AIDS Arns, Inc., Parkland, Dallas Urban League and the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center teamed up with Walgreens and Greater Than AIDS to provide free HIV testing at five Walgreens stores in Dallas County. The testing events took place June 27-29 in support of National HIV Testing Day.

Greater Than AIDS is a coalition of public and private sector partners united in response to the domestic epidemic. State and local health departments and AIDS service organizations coordinated the testing and provided results on-site at participating Walgreens locations, as well as supporting outreach.

Testing locations included nearly 175 Walgreens stores in 54 cities across 22 states. Hundreds of additional Walgreens stores in the participating communities helped publicize the free testing through in-store marketing and other programs.

Walgreens helped promote National HIV Testing Day with special messages June 27 on its Times Square digital display in New York City, the largest billboard of its kind in the country.

“Knowing your HIV status is a great benefit to individuals and to our community as a whole,” DCHHS Director Zachary Thompson said. “The partnership between DCHHS, Walgreens and Greater Than AIDS, gives people in our community the knowledge they need to make better decisions about their health in the future. This collaboration gives residents, who may have gone untested, multiple opportunities to get tested for free.”

This marks the third consecutive year Walgreens has teamed with Greater Than AIDS and local organizations to help bring free HIV testing to communities. This year, more than three times the number of stores and testing partners participated compared to 2012.

In 2011, it was estimated that 883 people in Dallas County were newly diagnosed with HIV. More than 13,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS in Dallas County, representing an increase of 41 percent in more than nine years. Of the new HIV diagnoses in 2011, 52.8 percent were in persons less than 35 years of age. Rates are disproportionately higher in African-Americans, representing nearly 50 percent of new HIV diagnoses. Free HIV testing will also be available at select Walgreens locations across the country.

“Access to testing, education and care are critical when it comes to the treatment and prevention of this complex condition,” said Glen Pietrandoni, senior manager of virology at Walgreens. “We have supported people living with HIV/AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic more than 30 years ago and will continue to be a trusted resource. Through this significant collaboration, we can help even more people get, stay and live well.”

Of the more than 1.1 million people living with HIV in the U.S. today, an estimated one in five, or nearly a quarter of a million people, do not know it. One third of those who are positive are diagnosed so late in the course of their infection they develop AIDS within one year. Early diagnosis and treatment saves lives and is known to reduce the spread of HIV. The CDC encourages everyone to know their status.

“Frequent testing is the first step towards early treatment and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS,” said Tina Hoff, senior vice president and director of Health Communication and Media Partnerships, Kaiser Family Foundation, a founding partner of Greater Than AIDS. “Greater than AIDS is pleased to once again mark National HIV Testing Day by collaborating with Walgreens and local and state governments to broaden access to HIV tests for people in many of the nation’s hardest-hit communities.”

Throughout the year, Walgreens and Greater Than AIDS distribute HIV informational resources at 700 Walgreens pharmacies in heavily affected communities. Designated by Walgreens as “Centers of Excellence,” these stores have pharmacists on hand to offer one-on-one medication counseling and other support services that provide customers living with HIV/AIDS – and their families – with compassionate, confidential care.

DCHHS and Cities Provide Mosquito Dunks

To control mosquito populations and combat West Nile virus, DCHHS is partnering with county municipalities to offer mosquito dunks to city residents. The product is for use on your own personal property and not for resale. Be sure to follow the product label. There is a limited supply and the program is on a first-come, first-serve basis. Call your home city for details.

Participating cities included:

Addison  DeSoto  Hutchins  Seagoville
Balch Springs  Duncanville  Irving  Sunnyvale
Carrollton  Farmers Branch  Lancaster  University Park
Cedar Hill  Garland  Mesquite  Wilmer
Cockrell Hill  Glenn Heights  Richardson  
Coppell  Grand Prairie  Rowlett  
Dallas  Highland Park  Sachse  

Linda Mason, DCHHS senior secretary, provides Carol Primeaux, senior environmental health sanitation for the City of Coppell, with mosquito dunks for Coppell residents.
Community Partners Train to Prepare the Blind /Visually Impaired for Disasters

For the final “Partners in Preparedness” forum before taking a summer break, the Public Health Preparedness Division focused on the needs and challenges of the blind and visually impaired before, during and after emergencies. One of the major goals of the June Partners in Preparedness program, which was funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was to connect Public Health and Emergency Management officials with organizations that serve vulnerable and at-risk populations such as the elderly, individuals who are deaf/hard-of-hearing, those who have limited English proficiency, etc. Agencies from all around Dallas County that work with the blind and visually impaired were invited to the forum to help public health staff and emergency managers understand the unique barriers and challenges their clients face during disasters.

Melissa Hildebrand from the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind presented on how blind people deal with everyday issues and how quickly disasters can disrupt those routines. She also explained how practicing emergency plans ahead of time is essential, especially during disasters that could involve evacuations.

“Even going down stairs during a regular fire drill can be difficult for a blind or visually impaired individual, so those issues get magnified when you’re dealing with a real disaster,” Hildebrand said. During the forum, PHP staff further encouraged the organizations that attended to work with their blind/visually impaired clients to develop emergency plans for their homes and places of employment.

When discussing how to get important information out to the blind/visually impaired, traditional media outlets such as TV and radio are the most common methods. Using social media is also seen as a valuable tool to encourage emergency preparedness among the blind/visually impaired before disaster strikes. At the forum, PHP staff members were able to provide emergency document bags with Braille labels on them so the organizations could pass them on to their clients as part of their personal emergency preparedness planning. DCHHS has also ordered Braille translations of several emergency preparedness materials to distribute as part of the “Fundamentals of Preparedness” training.

When discussing how to incorporate the needs of the blind/visually impaired in shelters, the group discussed including provisions for service animals in shelter planning considerations. It was also suggested that shelter staff need to give blind/visually impaired clients a thorough tour of the shelter to better orient them with their surroundings, making sure to point out key locations such as restrooms and service areas. Terry McManus with Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind added, “It’s very important for shelter staff to understand they just need to ask ‘How can I help you?’”

As a follow-up to the forum, PHP staff will train staff at several organizations on how to teach their clients about emergency preparedness and how to develop emergency plans for themselves and their families. The next Partners in Preparedness forum, scheduled for fall 2013, will cover the needs of individuals with mental/behavioral health issues.
DCHHS MRC Assists at local NACCHO Conference

Dallas County Health and Human Services was proud to serve on the host committee of the National Association of County and City Health Officials Annual Conference July 9-12 at the Omni Dallas Hotel. Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price and DCHHS Director Zachary Thompson offered opening remarks July 11, 2013.

Local health department leaders, public health partners and invited guests convened in Dallas at the largest gathering of local health officials in the United States, the NACCHO Annual Conference. In plenary sessions, attendees heard from national, regional, state and local health officials about the relationship between the Affordable Care Act and the work of local health departments, as well as the future of federal funding to support the nation’s public health system.

The Dallas County Medical Reserve Corps was asked by the annual NACCHO Conference organization committee to provide volunteers to fill hospitality roles throughout each of the three days of the conference.

A total of 24 MRC volunteers and five DCHHS Public Health Preparedness staff members contributed 67 hours serving as Directional Hosts or providing conference attendees with information at the Local Host Table. With more than 1,500 registered volunteers, the Dallas County unit is one of the largest of almost 978 MRC units across the country.

“It is only fitting that our health department supports NACCHO in protecting and improving the health of people’s lives,” said Thompson. “We enjoyed learning from our counterparts from across the nation at this year’s conference.”

The theme of this year’s annual meeting was “Public Health by the Numbers. Our Story, Our Time. Our Future.” Participants examined management strategies, unconventional partnerships and communications competencies to strengthen governmental public health programs. NACCHO Annual provides a forum for peer-to-peer sharing of ideas about preventing the leading causes of death, using data across the public health enterprise, maximizing organizational performance, informing policy and maintaining fiscal sustainability.