Health Department Celebrates Public Health Week, Services

How much do you know about your Health Department? National Public Health Week is giving the department a chance to shine a light on its many services.

During this week, the department is celebrating the power of prevention, its advocacy for healthy and fair policies, sharing strategies for successful partnerships and championing the role of a strong public health system.
“In addition to primary prevention programs and projects, the Monterey County Health Department provides many services including mental health services, immunizations, birth and death certificates, restaurant inspections, communicable disease surveillance and clinics,” says Elsa Jimenez, Director of Health.

There were informational tables a various county buildings throughout the week and each day of the week was dedicated to a particular health topic. Wednesday’s theme was science and for that, the department opened the doors to its public health lab.

It’s a place most people never see. The lab is a combined lab, doing both public health testing for communicable diseases, health threats and rabies for instance, plus environmental testing which would include water, soil and food. It also can test for bioterrorism elements and may add genetic testing in the future.

The lab is the only place in the county which can test for serious and contagious diseases such as tuberculosis and valley fever. It partners with hospitals for health tests and can do them very quickly, within hours thanks to its BSL (Bio Safety Level) 3 lab.

Staff in the lab are trained in a broad range of diseases. In case you were wondering, yes, it does have serious pathogens in storage, but don’t worry, they are samples used for comparison and while they are ‘active,’ they are not disease causing.

Find out more about the lab on the Health Department website.
Census Launch Showcases County, Community Effort for Accurate Count

The U.S. Census counts every resident in the United States, but you might wonder, why is that important for Monterey County?

Census data results are critical for federal funding decisions. Nearly $675 million dollars in Federal funds are allocated to 16 major programs that our communities rely on, programs for veterans, senior and older adult services, foster care, head start and housing assistance to name a few.

Additionally, census data determines the number of California’s congressional seats.

That is why on Monday, April 1st, leaders from throughout the county gathered in Castroville to launch census efforts and to call attention to the work ahead, one year before the actual census day, which will be April 1, 2020.

Laying the groundwork for the census is already well underway. The County has formed a coalition of community groups and agencies. The Complete Count Committee meets monthly and consists of county department representatives, representatives from cities, community-based organizations and community leaders. You can stay up to date on census activities on their webpage or social media.

The 2020 Census will be very challenging in many ways. It is an almost entirely digital this year and in Monterey County not everyone has internet access; the county has the highest rate of hard-to-count populations in the state and compounding those issues is increased fear due to the proposed census citizenship question. Monterey County has opposed this question and joined 18 other states to legally block this question and there may be a ruling on this issue soon.
Drive Like You Work There Say County Public Works Crews

RMA-Public Works crews are hoping next time you pass by a work area or a flagger alerting you a detour, you’ll drive like you work there.

That is the safety message crews are getting out this week, which is Work Zone Awareness Week.

Shawn Atkins, Public Works Maintenance Manager, brought many of his team members to the Board of Supervisors meeting this week to draw attention to the critical work done by Public Works and the dangers they face every day.

Atkins says Public Works is doing more safety training. On April 9th, there will be a “Go Orange Day” where staff will participate in a wide-ranging review of work zone issues.

The Division is also doing more outreach to the public about road work locations and schedules so drivers know in advance where troublesome areas may be. Atkins says if crews could ask one thing, they would ask drivers to put down their cell phones! 27% of crashes are due to cell phone distraction.

During Tuesday’s presentation, Supervisors gave the workers plenty of thanks for their efforts in the various districts, noting that when everyone is safe in their beds, it’s Public Works staff who are out in the worst weather or situations.
Soak in the beauty. Wildflowers are in bloom near the County Lakes