

Alabama's health

A publication of the Alabama Department of Public Health

Public Health Responds to Novel H1N1 Influenza

The spring outbreak of novel H1N1 influenza has served as a useful exercise of the comprehensive pandemic influenza planning and training that have taken place during the past few years. Public health staff throughout the state quickly became actively involved in the response, and useful lessons have been learned.

The situation progressed very rapidly, and planning and preparations were invaluable in setting the course for Alabama's quick and effective response to the novel H1N1 influenza virus. Among the many steps taken in recent years to prepare for pandemic influenza were a successful pandemic readiness and emergency preparedness summit held in February 2006 and the development of resources for individuals and families, childcare, schools and colleges, businesses, government, and first responders.

During the week of April 20, PCR analysis of samples in other states could not subtype influenza A isolates as either one of the known, seasonal subtypes. The Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention determined that a novel virus, first called "swine flu," was circulating and subsequently termed it 2009 A H1N1 influenza. The death rate being reported in Mexico was alarmingly high, and initially appeared far greater than that of the 1918 influenza pandemic.

On April 25 State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson activated the incident command system, the department began providing information to doctors and hospitals, and leaders were engaged in carrying out action plans to prepare for the outbreak to reach Alabama. Specialized tests were needed, and the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories geared up to perform them.

Dr. Williamson held the first of many statewide news conferences by satellite on Sunday, April 26, to inform and reassure the public about the department's response to this novel strain of influenza. The Mobile County Health Department worked closely with cruise lines and the U.S. Coast Guard to monitor and perform passive assessment of



Division of Epidemiology nurses Sharon Thompson and Phyllis Gilchrist and research analyst Allison Smith followed up with families and health care providers.

passengers arriving in Alabama from ports of call in Mexico.

Timely communication was crucial. Frequent conference calls were made with key area staff, daily conference calls were held with CDC, daily updates were posted on the department's Web site, news releases were distributed, public service announcements were recorded, and multiple interviews were held. Staff conducted hospital surveillance through the AIMS system. The ADPH Call Center was activated and regular situation reports were made.

continued on page 5

IT Conducts Statewide Employee Survey of Help Desk/Tech Support; Very Positive Results Recorded

The Bureau of Information Technology, formerly the Computer Systems Center, conducted its first survey of what is expected to be regular surveys to obtain feedback on customer satisfaction from employees. The survey was for the period Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2008, and the unit being surveyed was the IT Help Desk/Tech Support.

More than 350 people responded to the survey sent via e-mail to all employees statewide. The survey found the largest percentage of replies was from those with network inquiries (27.79 percent). The

vast majority (95.52 percent) responded that their problem was resolved or referred satisfactorily. Other areas of interaction reported were software (17.94 percent), hardware (25.75 percent), phone (14.88 percent), e-mail (9.85 percent), mainframe 3270 (8.75 percent), and acquisition or purchase (5.03 percent).

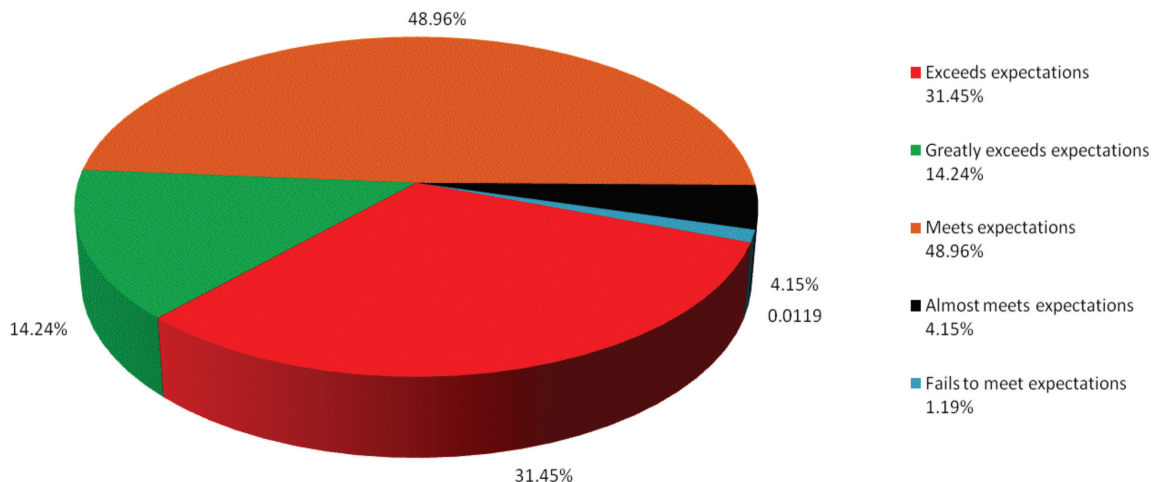
Additional positive findings were that the IT representatives provided service in a timely and responsive manner (97.04 percent). More than two-thirds (68.67 percent) replied that customer service is getting better, while 30.12 percent said

it remained about the same. Only 1.2 percent said customer service is getting worse.

John Heitman, Director of Information Technology, said, "The feedback we get from all employees helps us with planning and developing better ways of delivering customer service. This tool is a great way to measure our progress."

The bureau's mission is to plan, provide and support the information and logistical needs of the department. There were 25,593 Help Desk calls made in 2008.

Overall, how well is the IT Help Desk/Tech Support doing in meeting your expectations?



Alabama Department of Public Health Mission

To serve the people of Alabama by assuring conditions in which they can be healthy.

Value Statement

The purpose of the Alabama Department of Public Health is to provide caring, high quality and professional services for the improvement and protection of the public's health through disease prevention and the assurance of public health services to resident and transient populations of the state regardless of social circumstances or the ability to pay.

The Department of Public Health works closely with the community to preserve and protect the public's health and to provide caring quality services.

Alabama's Health

Alabama's Health is an official publication of the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease. If you would like to receive the publication or wish to submit information for future articles, please telephone requests to (334) 206-5300. Articles may be reprinted provided credit is given to the Alabama Department of Public Health. The department's Web site is <http://www.adph.org>.

Donald E. Williamson, M.D. State Health Officer
Jim McVay, Dr. P. A. Director, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease
Arrol Sheehan, M.A. Editor
Takenya S. Taylor, J.D. Contributing Editor
Noelle Ahmann Graphic Designer

Health Disparities in Alabama: Asthma

This is the fifth in a series of articles exploring health issues that affect Alabamians and which focus on disparities. Disparities are defined as differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality and burden of cancer and related adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups in the United States. These groups may be characterized by gender, age, ethnicity, education, income, social class, disability, geographic location or sexual orientation. The November 2008 publication, "A Preliminary State Plan of Action to Reduce and Eliminate Health Disparities in Alabama 2008," pages 55-60, describes the burden of asthma in Alabama and is excerpted here. Alabama's Asthma Burden Document, which can be read at www.adph.org/steps/ contains useful information on asthma's prevalence, burden, trends, environmental risk factors, treatment data and deaths from asthma.

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects the airways and lungs. In an asthma attack, airways become swollen and constricted, causing potentially life-threatening sequela. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 22.2 million people had asthma and 12.2 million had an asthma attack in the past year. In 2004, asthma accounted for 13.6 million doctor visits, 1.8 million emergency department visits, and 497,000 hospitalizations.

Asthma frequently interrupts daily activities, including attending school and going to work. According to the Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use and Mortality United States, data from CDC for 2003-05, children aged 5-17 missed 12.8 million days of school, and adults missed 11.8 million days of work.

Everyday exposures to agents such as cigarette smoke, mold, dust mites, pet dander, and pollens can trigger asthma attacks. Agents encountered by workers can also cause

allergic problems that include asthma. The CDC provides comprehensive information on effective interventions for asthma control, including identifying symptoms, diagnosis, medical management, and medications.

Asthma is on the rise in Alabama, increasing among males and females, in all age groups and among all races. According to 2007 Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System, 12.9 percent of adults reported they had asthma, up from 9.1 percent in 2000. Among youth in grades 9-12 in 2005, 24.0 percent reported they had ever been told they had asthma by a health care professional, according to the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. In 2007 there were 47 deaths from asthma in Alabama, according to the Center for Health Statistics.

According to the BRFSS, disparities in asthma exist in segments of the adult population in Alabama based on the following: race and ethnicity, gender, education, and income.

In 2007 the self-reported prevalence of asthma was greater among blacks (10.1 percent) than whites (8.2 percent). The prevalence was higher in women than men. Those with the least education (no high school diploma) reported more asthma (12.8 percent) than those with higher levels of education (5.5 percent among college graduates). Similarly, those with the lowest incomes (less than \$15,000 per year) had three times the prevalence than those with annual incomes over \$75,000 (16.2 percent versus 5.0 percent). Disparities also exist among Alabama youth with asthma. Black youth suffer more from asthma than white youth. However, in both races young males report more asthma than females.

In 2004 the Chronic Disease Prevention Division was awarded a five-year CDC Cooperative Agreement program. This program, Steps

to a Healthier Alabama, targets asthma, diabetes and obesity in seven counties of the state. This community-based program provides schools, teachers and staff with *Asthma 101: The Basics* training to ensure staff understood the disease and can assist a child with asthma.

Children in the third and fourth grades who have asthma received Open Airways training to learn self-management skills. These trainings were conducted annually in Pike and Barbour counties. In addition, an annual Asthma Safari was conducted in Pike County for asthmatic children in kindergarten through second grade to learn self-management skills. The Steps Program staff in Pike and Barbour counties worked with local medical doctors to promote the use of asthma action plans for every child with asthma.

In 2007 Alabama Medicaid implemented an asthma care coordination project to reduce fragmentation in the claims and processing system, and improve patient outcomes. The program, Alabama Medicaid Together for Quality, partners with ADPH to provide care coordination by licensed social workers to encourage patient compliance and utilization of community resources in 11 pilot counties. The care coordination includes monitoring use of medications, emergency department visits and hospitalizations.

In January 2008 the Steps Program collaborated with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management on an initiative for its 2008 Environmental Justice Plan which targeted asthma. In August 2008 Steps convened a statewide asthma coalition to bring community advocates, policy makers, health care providers and persons with asthma together to address the burden of asthma in Alabama.

continued on page 4

Asthma can be controlled with proper diagnosis, appropriate asthma care, and management activities. Policies to reduce the burden of asthma among both adults and youth with asthma must include access to quality health care, asthma care coordination services, medications, and patient education on asthma self-management skills. School policies should address students' permission to carry and self-administer quick-relief inhalers, on-site school nurses, asthma action plans for all students with asthma, student education on asthma awareness, and faculty/staff education on asthma.

One of the four recommendations made in the plan was to partner with other agencies and organizations "to support policy and environmental changes to reduce the burden of asthma." The Steps River Region and its partnership of the Montgomery County Commission, the City of Montgomery, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, YMCA of Montgomery, and the American Lung Association of Alabama succeeded in getting proclamations signed in support of tobacco-free city and county parks in Montgomery.

Officials Unveil 'No Tobacco' Signage



Gathered here at the ceremonial unveiling of a Young Lungs at Play sign are Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange; Montgomery Biscuits Drew Anderson, Matt Spring and Big Mo; Montgomery County Commission Chairman Elton N. Dean; Montgomery YMCA CEO Bob McGaughey; Steps to a Healthier Alabama Physical Activity Coordinator Leslie Knox; and Assistant State Health Officer for Personal and Community Health Dr. Tom Miller. The new signs indicate that Montgomery's city and county parks are tobacco free.

Commendations

If you would like to praise employees for their accomplishments, send letters of commendation to the State Health Officer or the employee's supervisor and a copy by e-mail to asheehan@adph.state.al.us for inclusion in this list. Four items are needed: the employee's name, work unit, name of the person making the commendation, and his or her city and state.

Izza Afgan

Brandi Robinson
Center for Health Statistics
from Michele Williams
Montgomery, Ala.

Linda Bolding

Center for Health Statistics
from Catherine W. Hall
Detroit, Mich.

Rebecca Cantrell, RN

Rebecca Farr, RN
Margie Israel, RN
Randolph/Chambers
Home Health
from Elaine Noles
Roanoke, Ala.
Gene A. Chatman
Hazel Green, Ala.

Teela Carmack

Children's Health Insurance
from Gov. Bob Riley
Montgomery, Ala.
and Caren Grantham
Meridianville, Ala.

Ellen James

Mike Jarrett
Frederick Reeves
Charlyne White

Health Provider Standards
from Brian L. McFelly, NHA
Mobile, Ala.

Mike Jarrett

Frederick Reeves
Regina Runderson
Health Provider Standards
from Gail G. McInnish
Bay Minette, Ala.

Cassandra Henderson

Center for Health Statistics
from Marty W. Smith
Carrollton, Ga.

Nicole Henderson

Center for Health Statistics
from Kathryn Shields
Norcross, Ga.

LaShondra Lewis

Tobacco Prevention and Control
from Thurston S. Smith,
CDC, NCAC I
Birmingham, Ala.

Theresa Mulkey

Center for Health Statistics
from Bob Edmonson
Montgomery, Ala.

Elana Parker

Professional and
Support Services
from Alabama School of Alcohol
and Other Drugs Studies

Jesse Pevear

Health Promotion
& Chronic Disease
from Carol Mysinger
Montgomery, Ala.

Gerry Pose

Disease Control
from W. Dragicevich
Lawton, Mich.

Melanie Rightmyer

Health Promotion
and Chronic Disease
from Carolyn Hutcheson
Montgomery, Ala.

Shelia Underwood

Health Provider Standards
from Nancy Pearce,
RN, RAC-CT, WCC
Dothan, Ala.

H1N1, continued from page 1

In preparation for possible pandemic flu, the Alabama Department of Public Health had purchased 700,000 courses of antivirals and later received additional courses and personal protective equipment. The department also had 1 million masks available for distribution.

The Center for Emergency Preparedness and Logistics unit shipped personal protective equipment to all public health areas on April 27 and later distributed the Strategic National Stockpile of antiviral medications.

When probable cases were identified, nurses and analysts with the Division of Epidemiology contacted the health care providers and families of the individuals for appropriate follow-up and evaluation.

The first probable “swine” flu cases in Alabama were identified on April 29. The lab forwarded specimens determined to be influenza A to the CDC which confirmed them as influenza A H1N1. Three school systems in Madison County were closed after students were confirmed with the illness, in accordance with CDC recommendations then in effect.

On May 12 the department received validation from CDC to perform confirmatory testing. The department began with two DNA extractors (one low through-put and one high through-put) and one PCR machine. After the acquisition of four machines, the bureau processed nearly 2,000 specimens utilizing six-day work weeks and long hours put in by laboratorians. Other ADPH personnel were deployed to assist where possible. Through-put increased from 8 to nearly 200 specimens per day.

The lab provided reports of probable and confirmed cases to the Epidemiology Division. Surveillance staff then contacted health care providers and patients’ families by telephone, determined their student

or employment status, completed case surveillance questionnaires, and collaborated with Health Marketing staff to design and maintain H1N1 web pages.

Dr. Williamson acknowledged all of the department’s employees for their excellent response to H1N1 influenza and their sustained performance, especially staff of the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories and the Center for Emergency Preparedness.

In a televised interview Dr. Williamson said, “We have an almost unlimited number of challenges. The outbreak has helped us think about things we do well and also about the opportunities for change. We need to make sure we have prepared and learned from this experience. One of the challenges to be solved is the production of vaccine and how to decide how to give it.”

Perhaps the most frequent question he was asked is whether the health threat from H1N1 influenza is being exaggerated. He explained, “We are walking a fine line by trying to not unduly alarm people, but with this evolving virus our message will change if the situation becomes more dismal.”

On June 11 the World Health Organization raised the pandemic alert level from phase 5 to 6, meaning that a global outbreak has begun. The last pandemic — the Hong Kong flu of 1968 — killed about 1 million people. Ordinary seasonal flu kills about 250,000 to 500,000 people each year.

Health care utilization is expected to increase greatly this fall, but the department is doing its best to prepare. The department will maintain a system to detect predicted recurrence of A H1N1 during the upcoming influenza season, to await decisions about vaccine (such as monovalent versus quadrivalent, number of doses), to improve the data collection processes, and to revisit the pandemic influenza plan.



Newly appointed Laboratory Director Sharon Massingale, Ph.D., led the response to novel H1N1 influenza at the lab. A nine-year veteran employee of the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories, Dr. Massingale played a critical formative role in several major initiatives including H1N1.



Dr. Martha Sanchez, Ana Oliviera and Sherri Davidson analyze H1N1 disease data.



State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson and Gov. Bob Riley view a Strategic National Stockpile shipment before it is sent to regional distribution sites. Shown (left to right) are Russ Browning, Roy Case, DeAnn White, Gov. Riley, Dena Donovan and Dr. Williamson.

Counties Celebrate National Public Health Week 2009

Blount County: Employees set up an informational booth in the health department lobby providing ALL Kids bags for people to hold educational brochures, including those provided on all public health services.

Cherokee County provided an information/brochure table.

Etowah County: Staff members prepared a display table with brochures covering all Public Health Services in Etowah County. Employees also stepped up outreach in the communities of DeKalb County and Etowah counties, primarily promoting home care services in public health. Assistant Area Administrator Mark Johnson spoke to a Social Service Committee at Gadsden State Community College providing area social service agencies education on public health services ranging from clinic to home care to environmental services.

Perry County: The Annual Public Health Day was celebrated on April 8 at Perry County Health Department in Marion.

The services offered were blood pressure checks, blood sugar checks, cholesterol screening, eye screening, bone density checks, HIV tests, body mass index, breast examinations, assessment of risk for heart disease, and diet management education. Services provided by the department were also exhibited including a display by ALL Kids. Alabama Tombigbee Regional Planning Commission and Perry County Extension Service also had displays. Public Health Day was sponsored by Samford University (Nurse Practitioners, Pharmacy Students and Pharmacists), Sowing Seeds of Hope, Judson College, and Perry County Health Department.

St. Clair County provided an information table highlighting public health services.

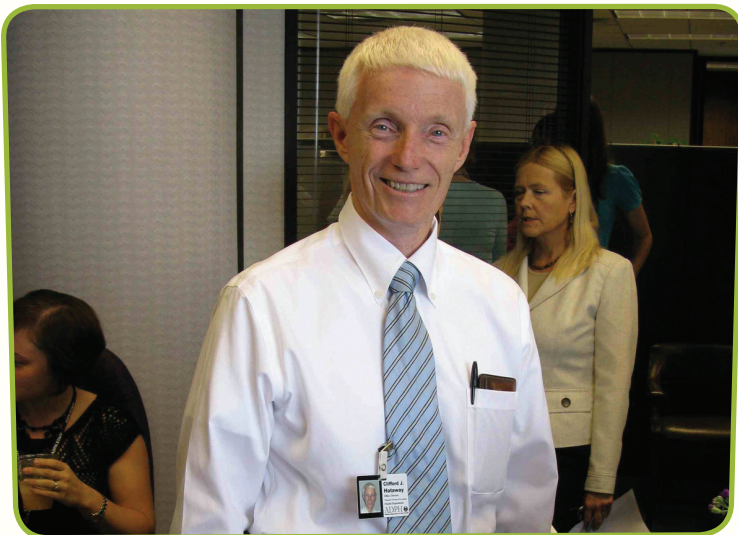
Shelby County focused on epidemiology and emergency preparedness by providing free hand gel. They also combined National Child Abuse Month in their booth.

Sumter County: Free prostate cancer screenings were offered to the citizens of

Sumter and surrounding counties on April 1 in Livingston. Dr. Bryant Poole and Dr. Tom Holley of Urology Centers of Alabama were there for PSA and DRE examinations. One hundred five male citizens took advantage of this free screening event, and services provided by the department were also exhibited. Public Health Day was sponsored by Urology Centers of Alabama, P.C.; Sumter County Health Department; and Health and Wellness Education Center.



Prostate cancer screening was offered at no charge to men in Sumter County April 11 by Urology Centers of Alabama, P.C., the Sumter County Health and Wellness Education Center and the Sumter County Health Department.



Dr. Jack Hataway, Medical Director for Chronic Disease Prevention with the Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease, retired June 1 after 30 years of service. Coworkers honored him for his 19 years of dedicated service with the department and earlier with the University of Alabama at Birmingham.



Public Health Area 2 employees dressed in green T-shirts in support of Earth Day 2009.



The Lawrence County Center of Technology Health Occupations Class participated in GO RED. Students stuffed the teachers' mailboxes with GO RED for Women brochures, GO RED registration cards, wallet cards and heart check-up brochures. The students constructed a bulletin board for the student body and faculty to read and enjoy. The health occupations students and their instructor discussed the 2009 fact sheet and watched conversations from the heart from the GO RED Web site. The students were given red dress pins this year. The students wore red on Feb. 6 and on their uniforms the remainder of the school year. Students who wore red received a small gift and had their pictures taken for the GO RED campaign, and these pictures were submitted to the Lawrence County Health Department. Health department employees were excited about the students' enthusiasm and were very appreciative of their eagerness to participate.

Seniors at the West Alabama Nutrition Coalition dressed in red for Go Red for Heart. Tyana Dixon decorated the tables with red bags with chocolate hearts. Before seniors were allowed to take a heart out, they had to put a inspiring thought in the bag. Ms. Dixon also placed heart-shaped candles which are being lighted daily before dinner to remind everyone to take care of her heart. The Clarke County Health Department also promoted Go Red by setting up a colorful three-panel display.



CDC Answers Questions About Breastfeeding and H1N1 Influenza

Does breastfeeding protect babies from this new flu virus?

There are many ways that breastfeeding and breast milk protect babies' health. Since this is a new virus, we don't know yet about specific protection against it. Mothers pass on protective antibodies to their baby during breastfeeding. Antibodies are a type of protein made by the immune system in the body. Antibodies help fight off infection.

Flu can be very serious in young babies. Babies who are not breastfed get sick from infections like the flu more often and more severely than babies who are breastfed.

Should I stop breastfeeding my baby if I think I have come in contact with the flu?

No. Because mothers make antibodies to fight diseases they come in contact with, their milk is custom-made to fight the diseases their babies are exposed to as well. This is really

important in young babies when their immune system is still developing. Breastfeeding also helps the baby to develop his own ability to fight off diseases.

Is it ok to breastfeed my baby if I am sick?

Yes. This is really important.

- Do not stop breastfeeding if you are ill. Ideally babies less than about 6 months of age should get their feedings from breast milk. Breastfeed early and often. Limit formula feeds as much as possible. This will help protect your baby from infection.
- If you are too sick to breastfeed, pump and have someone give the expressed milk to your baby.

If my baby is sick, is it okay to breastfeed?

Yes. One of the best things you can do for your sick baby is keep breastfeeding.

Alabamians Lose Nearly 200,000 Pounds in Scale Back Alabama 2009

More than 40,000 Alabamians participated in Scale Back Alabama, the state's annual weight-loss competition. Led by Coach Roger Shultz, a former University of Alabama football player and the 2008 runner up on the Biggest Loser Couples Show, the event resulted in 183,135 pounds lost statewide between Jan. 8 and March 20.

"The goal of Scale Back Alabama is to encourage healthy lifestyles," State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson said. "Alabama's the third most obese state in the nation, and we simply cannot continue our old habits and expect to be healthy."

Roger Shultz, who lost 164 pounds during the 2008 television contest, said, "My main message throughout the contest was to 'eat less and move more.' I know; I've been there, and I realize how much better I feel now that I'm watching what I eat and exercising."

Scale Back Alabama is a 10-week contest sponsored by the Alabama Hospital Association and the Alabama Department of Public Health, with generous underwriting from Barber's Dairies and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama. The 2009 contest was the third such contest

in which teams compete to win prizes and benefit from weekly tips and lesson plans on healthy lifestyles.

Bad Boys, a team from the Department of Transportation in Montgomery County, won the grand prize of \$1,000 per team member. A team from Madison County, Three Girls and a Guy, was tied with the Pound Smashers of the Central Office. Winning prizes of \$500 per person were Dawarris Jackson of Information Technology and three employees of Video Communications--Sayed Alamy, Sandra Blakely and Angela Purter. The third place team was called the "Big 'Dam' Losers" and it consisted for employees from Alabama Power Co. in Wetumpka.

Names of all teams on which each person lost at least 10 pounds during the contest were drawn live via satellite broadcast and webcast. In addition to the team drawings, the names of individuals who lost at least 10 pounds, even though their entire team didn't, were included in a separate drawing for individual prizes.

"The focus of the contest is adults, particularly those in the workplace, but our hope is that their good habits will also spread to their families," said Donald J. Jones, FACHE, chairman of the Scale Back

Alabama Task Force and CEO of Marion Regional Medical Center in Hamilton. "With almost every county participating, we know the messages got out and many Alabamians will be healthier as a result."

Information is available at www.scalebackalabama.com.

Statistics from Scale Back Alabama 2009:
Total pounds lost statewide – 183,135
Total number of people participating – 40,772
Number of teams on which all people lost 10 pounds – 690
Total number of individuals that lost at least 10 pounds – 9,701
Average weight loss among those who lost at least 10 pounds – 14.22



Pictured at the Scale Back celebration, left to right, are Teresa Fair, Laurie Eldridge-Auffant of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Division, Roger Shultz and Miriam Gaines, division director.

Retirees

April

Karon James

Marengo County Health Department

Sandra Langston

Division of Sexually Transmitted Disease

Joan McGough

Bureau of Communicable Disease

May

Martha Farmer

Lawrence County Health Department

Sara Holland

Talladega County Health Department

Ollie Humphries

Montgomery County Health Department

Peggy Hutto

Morgan County Health Department

Paula Lansdon

Bureau of Clinical Laboratories

Phyllis Magee

Etowah County Health Department

Susan Murdock

Bureau of Clinical Laboratories

Edith Nave

Morgan County Health Department

Ruth Webb

Houston County Health Department



Team Academy March

Ona Jean Abbott, Deborah Baker, Carly Batman, Leslie Britt, Linda Broadrick, Marcella Coblenz, Terri Crane, Novalee Dewitt, Rick Elliott, Carol Gerard, Vickie Haynes, Debbie Hobbs, Debra Hodges, Pat Ivie, Annette Johnson-Bell, Debbie Jones, Cynthia McAlpin, Jeff McCool, John McKissic, Stanford (Rusty) Miller, Kristi Mitchell, Regina Mitchell, Rhonda Morgan, Keitha Parker, Brenda Boyer Payne, Steven Peyer, Tom Robertson, Ronnie Russell, Brenda Ryals, Debbie Sullins, Mary Urquhart, Debra White, Eric Williams, Michele Williams.



Team Academy April

Lenita Akles, Kay Batchelor, Bridget Byrd, Linda Childers, Lylita Crayton, Ann Dagostin, Tommy Dockery, Leigh Ann Ezell, Judith Glenn, Glenda Harris, Fleetwood (Woody) Hines, Gayla Hollis, Marie Hughes, C.W. Johnson, Molly Killman, Stephan Mambazo, Phyllis Mardis, Robin Merkel, Eric Morgan, Janette Moss, Regina Patterson, Brandi Robinson, Josephine Forte, Terri Taylor, Vickie Turner, Craig Wilson, Jane Wishum, Terina Wood.



Team Academy May

Norma Acoff, Brenda Beech, Debbie Bell, Donald Bird, Diane Brewer, Michelle Britt, James Brown, Monty Carroll, Treva Clayton, Victor Creagh, Floy Crowley, Chiquita Dixon, Craig Dowell, Lamikia Elliott, Jennifer Hare, Denise Helms, Bob Hinds, Donna Hydrick, Joyce Johnson, Jenny Knox, Quincy Leonard, Kathy McCormack, Marnetta McDaniel, Teresa Moore, Thad Pittman, Delia Reynolds, Nancy Robinson, Arnita Shepherd, Kashera Sims, Debbie Sullins, Debbie Thomasson, Lani Thompson, Pat Toston, Sylvia Ware, Tamekie Washington.

Innovator, Mentor Moves on to Other Pursuits

In her 32 years of departmental service, Frances Barnes Kennamer has placed her imaginative imprint on public health as a visionary who initiates and implements programs that enhance public health. As she retires from her position as director of the Bureau of Professional and Support Services on June 1, she has agreed to take a look back on her career in public health and share some of her memories.

When Ms. Kennamer was hired as information specialist in the Division of Immunization in September 1977 she was employed to help restore the public's trust in influenza immunizations after what some called the swine flu debacle of 1976.

"It's interesting that 32 years later I'm retiring in the midst of another swine flu epidemic," Ms. Kennamer said. In an award-winning article she wrote for *Alabama's Health* in 1978, she described her early experiences in "Frances' adventures in Bearland—A day with the 'Bear.'" She and her colleagues strategized that legendary University of Alabama Athletic Director Paul "Bear" Bryant would be the most effective Alabamian to convince the chronically ill and elderly to get their flu shots. She successfully arranged for Coach Bryant to record a television PSA.

In 1983 she was awarded the Guy M. Tate Award of the Alabama Public Health Association for her "energy, efficiency and intelligence" in generating a public relations and education program in the area of immunization. When she began her career, she recalls that the now multibillion dollar Immunization budget was only \$384,000 for the entire state. She served in many ALPHA offices, including as president in 1988.

To broaden her education, she earned a master's degree in public administration at Auburn University at Montgomery and completed all six levels of the Certified Public Manager program. During the late 1980s she became interested in studying the science of management, became grants review officer for the agency, coordinator of the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, and director of the Policy Analysis Branch of the Office of Management Services.

Former State Health Officer Dr. Earl Fox assembled special "integrated core services" teams with the goal of improving services at the local level. Ms. Kennamer worked with Clyde Barganier, Gwen Lipscomb, Sherry George and others to visit county health departments, analyzing their paperwork demands and studying the physical structure of the facilities. Always at the forefront was her interest in helping public health do what is possible with what is available.

The new Office (now Bureau) of Professional and Support Services was created when the Central Office moved to the RSA Tower. When Kathy Vincent, staff assistant to State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson, alerted Ms. Kennamer to the new grant opportunity for a children's health insurance program, she undertook writing one. That was the beginning of the Alabama CHIP program, and Alabama's became the first approved plan in the nation.

Always in the forefront as a "project starter," Ms. Kennamer also met with Dr. Charles Woernle, assistant state health officer for Disease Control and Prevention, to apply for a grant to begin the state's emergency preparedness program. In both cases she began with a blank slate to make application for grants which initially



Frances Kennamer

were less than \$1 million and have since helped millions of Alabamians.

"The guiding principle for emergency preparedness is that it should not be isolated—it's everyone's business and that has stayed a major part of it." Alabama's emergency response remains a shared responsibility even though the department has a robust Center for Emergency Preparedness.

Another area in which she has been deeply involved is with workforce development. A scholar in the first South Central Public Health Leadership Institute class, she served on the Advisory Board for South Central Public Health Workforce Partnership. She remains active on the advisory board for the partnership which includes the state health departments of Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana and the schools of public health at Tulane and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The partnership has been able to sustain a regional approach to training that has remained strong, even with budget cuts.

So many of the department's initiatives and programs have Ms. Kennamer's imprint on them. These include countless training opportunities through the years.

continued on page 11

Retirement, continued from page 10

TEAM Academy is a part of it, and it was prompted by the need for succession planning. She credited the state health officer, "I'm so grateful for Dr. Williamson's full support."

She takes pride in the many individuals she has helped reach their desired professional goals. One is Shelia Puckett, former Elmore County office manager and Professional and Support Services office manager who completed her bachelor's degree magna cum laude in "night" school and who is now a health services administrator, TEAM Academy project coordinator and state clerical director.

Administrative support is so important to our department's functioning. "Even when there was no state clerical director and the area clerical directors had only me as their state-level advocate, we were able to analyze the whole scope of clerical functions and create a Clerical Orientation Manual for local clerks. The analysis also resulted in the area clerical directors being recognized as members of area management teams statewide."

In the area of department review of proposed research, she worked with General Counsel John Wible and Dr. Woernle to establish an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the department which meets the strict and complex federal guidelines for approval of government research. The IRB considers whether proposed projects are "ethically sound". One project the IRB reviews each year is PRAMS, the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System surveillance project. She also was responsible for establishing the DOAR Committee which stands for Department Overview and Approval of Research. This is an internal review process which assures proposed projects are good science, do not require more time than staff can provide, and most importantly, whether the department or

study subjects could be adversely affected by participating.

She is very proud of all of the offices and divisions created in the bureau and the many achievements they have made. "This office is almost like Windows or Vista, running in the background in support of other operations," Ms. Kennamer said. "We want to be there to support projects and initiatives throughout the department by helping staff plan strategically and maximize support."

Several offices and divisions were created or reorganized under her leadership including Nutrition and Physical Activity, Women's Health, Strategic National Stockpile, Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, Social Work's ACORN system, Workforce Development/Training, Limited English Proficiency, prison re-entry program/public health liaison, and the separation and revitalization of the Offices of Primary Care and Rural Health and Minority Health.

Listed here are a few of the multiple work projects in which she has had a hand:

SPAR, developed along with Ed Davidson in Finance - To integrate budgeting, strategic planning, and project management.

Policy Clearinghouse - Allows widespread input before policies are finalized

Prescription Drug Monitoring Program - Currently works with many partners to prevent prescription abuse through a prescription database

Electronic Health Record - Just begun in 2009

Obesity Task Force and Women's Health Steering Committee - Both work to place emphasis on lifestyle issues to positively impact community and personal health

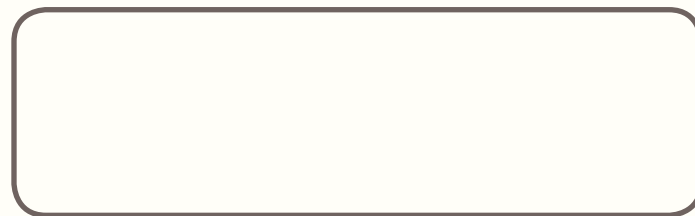
HIPAA-worked with the Office of General Counsel in development of the department's HIPAA policy, procedures, and staff training program

Retirement will not end Ms. Kennamer's commitment to public health. "Once you work in public health, it becomes part of your being, your self-identity," Ms. Kennamer said. Other goals include breaking 100 in golf, volunteering with the Montgomery Historical Society, and visiting her daughter Helen, a speech pathologist in Nashville.

In an e-mail to her friends and colleagues on Nurses' Appreciation Week, she stated, "I have seen time and time again the caring and passion each of you brings to work each day—from making policy changes to improve nursing practice to rendering excellent care to individuals whom other health professionals might not wish to see." And in another recent e-mail to the Area Clerical Directors she said, "You are a truly awesome group! I may have been your official 'director' but all I really did is provide the opportunities, support, and a loud and persistent voice for you all to give the department the benefit of your expertise and experience. Having Public Health Clerical as part of the Bureau of Professional and Support Services has indeed been a privilege.

She concluded both e-mails with this apt statement, "Even though I am 'officially' retiring, I will never retire from being a public health advocate and neither will you."

Michele Jones, who was appointed as her successor, said, "Frances set the standard of excellence for our bureau. It is one that we will maintain for the coming years. She is a great mentor, encourager, and leader. We will miss her, but wish her every happiness in her retirement!"



Calendar of Events



July 6

**Tobacco Prevention
Advocacy... Not Lobbying**
2-3 p.m. (CT)

For more information
contact Susan Altman,
(334) 206-2776.



July 8

**Caring for a Bedbound
Patient (for Home Health
Aides and Attendants)**
2-4 p.m. (CT)

For more information
contact Shirley Offutt,
(334) 206-2481.



July 9

**ADPH Statewide
Staff Meeting**
3-4 p.m. (CT)

For more information
contact Video
Communications,
(334) 206-5618.



July 15

**ADPH Nursing Continuing
Education Program:
Center for Emergency
Preparedness' Website**
8-9 a.m. (CT)

For more information
contact Thresa Dix,
(334) 206-3377.



July 16

**ADPH Nurse
Practitioner Training**
2-3:30 p.m. (CT)

For more information
contact Ramona Hawkins,
(205) 221-9775.



July 21

**Responding to Victims
with Burn Injuries in
Disaster Events**
12 noon - 1:30 p.m. (CT)

For more information
contact Video
Communications,
(334) 206-5618.



August 5

**Wound Care for Home
Health Nurses**
2-4 p.m. (CT)

For more information
contact Shirley Offutt,
(334) 206-2481.