

# HEALTH HAPPENINGS

## A quarterly newsletter brought to you by Nashoba Associated Boards of Health

*Serving the public health needs of Ashburnham, Ashby, Ayer, Berlin, Bolton, Boxborough, Devens, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Lunenburg, Pepperell, Shirley, Stow, Townsend, and the community of Devens*

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Issue: Summer (August) 2025

### Summer 2025

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***Above photo: Eastern Bluebird by Bridgette Pontbriand, RS- NABH Sanitarian & Senior Food Inspector***

Greetings and warmest wishes! We hope you're having a wonderful, safe and healthy summer, and you've found ways to beat the heat. We have some fresh faces at NABH- please join us in welcoming our new Finance and Administration Manager Kelley Mesiti and our newest Health Agent, Brittany Muller. Mosquitoes and ticks are out in MA- more on how to protect yourself and your loved ones from bites on page 4! We are thrilled to announce we are in the process of our first-ever NABH-region-specific community health needs assessment- and we need YOU to weigh in! If you're a resident of one of our towns, please take the survey on page 8, and tell your local friends. Your perspectives matter in shaping the future of public health in our region!

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## Agency Updates- Environmental Division:



The Nashoba Associated Boards of Health (NABH) Environmental Division continues to work directly with our member Boards of Health and residents in our towns, enforcing State Sanitary and Environmental Codes, Massachusetts General Laws, and local regulations. NABH Sanitarians/health agents are available in member communities to collaborate with other town boards, meet with the public and respond to citizens' public health related questions, concerns and complaints. The Environmental Division welcomes Brittany Muller, MPH, to the team as our newest Health Agent!

## Rabies Reminders: BATS!

Have you found a bat in your house? Bats can find their way into our homes by squeezing through holes as small as half an inch! Occasionally residents will tell us they woke up to discover a bat in their bedroom- sometimes alerted by a pet's response to the bat. 🦇

Why should you act if you find a bat in your bedroom, or that of your child, and can't rule out that you encountered the bat? Bats can carry the virus that causes rabies. The teeth and claws of bats are so small that a bite or scratch may leave only a very small mark, and the wound may not bleed or hurt. Thus, a person may not realize that an exposure has occurred or may not take the exposure seriously enough to feel that it warrants attention, and they may fail to report the exposure. (Cont'd on page 3) 🦇

## Recreational Waters & Bathing Beaches: the role of your local Board of Health

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health is responsible for promulgating regulations which provide standards for the safe operation of semipublic and public beaches. Your local Board of Health is charged with the enforcement of this regulation. The Board issues a permit for these beaches, ensures weekly testing of the bathing waters, monitors the results and is available for questions and site inspections as warranted. The weekly testing is uploaded to the State's data portal. Here is a link to the webpage where the results for beaches testing, throughout the state are posted: [www.mass.gov/info-details/interactive-beach-water-quality-dashboard](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/interactive-beach-water-quality-dashboard). This page allows you view the water quality for beaches which are permitted by health departments and those operated by the State.

The regulation requires weekly water quality testing. E coli is the organism our communities use to determine if the water is acceptable for swimming and testing occurs during the operating season. If any one weekly sample exceeds the standard (235 colonies) or the geometric mean of the last five sample exceeds the standard (126 colonies), the beach will be closed until the bacterial standard is met.

Animal waste, improper discharge of sewage and intensity of the beach use are some of the sources that may affect the water quality of bathing beaches. Natural bodies of water are susceptible to algae blooms; some algae and large concentrations of these algae can cause skin irritation and rash and may make small animals sick. The Board of Health may ask operators to close beaches impacted by a harmful algae bloom until the water quality improves.

*For information on the water quality of your local beach, please visit the link provided above, contact the beach operator or contact the NABH office at (978) 772-3335.*

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## Agency Updates- Public Health Nursing Division:



Our public health nurses have been hard at work keeping our communities healthy! In addition to the required, and often behind the scenes, disease reporting and surveillance work, the NABH nurses are available for clinics, consultations, home visits, and to offer or help coordinate educational programs. Some staffing updates: Bridget Hurley has moved on to a new position- we wish her the best of luck and thank her for the care and attention she has provided to our residents. Alicia Lepardo, RN continues to work with us part-time as she is also finishing her Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner program, and we hope to have the positions of Public Health Nurse Manager (RN) and Public Health Nurse (RN) filled shortly. Town Nurse Hours are still "paused" through the month of August, and we have made the decision to keep Town Nurse Hours paused through September and October while we re-staff our Public Health Nursing Department. We will re-evaluate in September with the possibility of resuming in November! In the meantime, please call us with any questions or concerns.

Visit the Public Health Nursing page on our website <https://www.nashoba.org/public-health> to learn more about all of the services offered by the "Town Nurses."

## Rabies Reminders: BATS Cont'd.

(Cont'd. from page 2) What should you do if this happens to you? The State Laboratory, operated by the Massachusetts Department Public Health (MDPH), can test animals for rabies and your local Board of Health or Animal Control Officer can facilitate the submission of the animals for testing. The bat should be captured, avoid damaging the animal, and you should contact the Board of Health to discuss the potential exposure to the bat. Information on how to capture a bat, and how you can "Bat-Proof" your home can be found at this DPH website: [www.mass.gov/lists/rabies-information-for-the-general-public](http://www.mass.gov/lists/rabies-information-for-the-general-public).



If it is determined the bat should be tested, it will be sent to the State Laboratory for testing; test results are generally received in one or two days after submission and the Laboratory we reach out to the person who was potentially exposed with the results. If you think you have been exposed to a bat and it cannot be obtained for testing, you should reach out to your primary care physician for next steps. If you should have any questions regarding this process, please don't hesitate to reach out to discuss this information.

Bats are really interesting creatures and good for our ecosystems. Preventing bats from entering your home in the first place is the best way to coexist with them! Learn more about bats and how to Bat-Proof your home: [www.mass.gov/info-details/bats-in-the-home](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/bats-in-the-home).

## Flu Clinic Planning



Plans are well under way for our annual fall flu clinics. Please stay tuned for details. We are considering multiple factors in our planning including the 20% drop in overall clinic attendance last year, the widespread availability of vaccines in the community, and our current staffing constraints. This year, we are partnering with Westminster Family Pharmacy to offer our large regional vaccination clinics, with Ayer-Pepperell Family Pharmacy on deck to partner with any of our towns that will not be hosting an NABH clinic this year or desire a smaller clinic at a COA, community center, etc.

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## Mosquitoes and Ticks

Ticks and mosquitoes are out in MA! The bites of these nasty little critters can spread disease. The best defense is preventing bites. Protect yourself and your loved ones by following a few simple tips to lower your risk of bites!



### Massachusetts arbovirus update

Find local risk levels for Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile Virus (WNV) based on seasonal testing from June to October:

[www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-arbovirus-update](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-arbovirus-update)

### PREVENT MOSQUITO BITES

USE THESE SIMPLE STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY FROM MOSQUITO BITES!



Avoid outside hours from dusk to dawn



Make your aroma less appealing



Wear long-sleeved clothing



Repair window and door screens



Use insect repellent (DEET, picaridin)



Remove standing water

For more information, visit:

[www.mass.gov/info-details/mosquito-borne-disease-prevention](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/mosquito-borne-disease-prevention)



For more information, visit:  
[www.mass.gov/info-details/tick-borne-disease-prevention](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/tick-borne-disease-prevention)

### NASHOBA ASSOCIATED BOARDS OF HEALTH TICK PREVENTION CHECKLIST

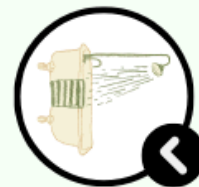
Toss clothing in dryer on high for 15 minutes. If washing, use hot water.



Wear tall socks and pull over pants, if possible.



Shower or bathe as soon as you return inside.



Apply tick repellent. Use as labeled (Permethrin for clothes, ≥20% DEET or Picaridin for skin).



Mow lawn regularly. Avoid tall grass in yards, parks and recreation areas while hiking.



Wear light-colored clothing with sleeves.



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## Agency Updates- Grief Support Program:

Nashoba Associated Boards of Health welcomes adults who are experiencing grief to participate in monthly, drop-in Grief & Healing Support Groups throughout the region. Offered by NABH Grief Counselor Karen Campbell, MSMHC, these groups are an opportunity to learn more about the grief process and strategies for managing grief. These Grief & Healing Support Groups honor all types of grief, including grief due to loss, change and transitions. This program is generously funded by grants and donations and will continue for as long as funding remains available.



## Why Should Communities Offer Grief Support?

Grief education and support provides community members with the tools to properly manage their grief. Proper management of grief, with education and support, is preventative care for mental health and quite often, physical health. Unmanaged grief potentially increases the occurrences of isolation, depression, antisocial behavior, neglect of physical health, unhealthy practices such as alcohol and substance abuses, domestic violence, and relapses in previous successful management of psychopathologies. Grief education and grief support promote healthy living in communities.

### How does grief support tie in with public health?

Check out this recent article from the Network for Public Health Law on what makes grief support a determinant of health outcomes and a population health concern: [www.networkforphl.org/news-insights/acknowledging-grief-as-a-determinant-of-health-public-health-needs-to-listen-and-learn/](http://www.networkforphl.org/news-insights/acknowledging-grief-as-a-determinant-of-health-public-health-needs-to-listen-and-learn/)



## Grief & Healing Support Group Schedule\*

*\*subject to change- please check website to confirm dates and times*

### 1st Tuesday:

- Ashburnham: 10:30 AM @ Stevens Memorial Library
- Bolton: 1 PM @ Bolton Public Library
- Boxborough: 3 PM @ Sargent Memorial Library

### 2nd Monday\*:

- Shirley Library: 12 PM @ Hazen Memorial Library
- Harvard: 2 PM @ Harvard Senior Center
- Lunenburg: 4 PM @ Lunenburg Library
- Pepperell Library: 6:30 PM @ the Lawrence Library

**Note:** October's 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday groups vary due to a Monday holiday. The Pepperell Library group is cancelled and will resume in Nov. Shirley, Harvard, and Lunenburg groups will be Wed. 10/15, same time, for October ONLY.

- 3rd Tuesday:**
- Townsend: 10 AM @ Townsend Senior Center
  - Ashby: 12 PM @ Ashby Free Public Library
  - Groton: 2 PM @ Groton Senior Center
  - Ayer: 4 PM @ The Ayer Library

### Fourth Monday:

- Pepperell COA: 10 AM, Albert Harris Ctr.
- Lancaster: 12:30 PM, Lancaster Community Ctr.

Please visit <https://www.nashoba.org/calendar> for the latest grief support schedule. Visit <https://www.nashoba.org/grief-support> to learn more.

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## Community Partnership:

We continue to engage with our communities to both lead and support efforts to keep our residents healthy! Since our last newsletter, we have participated in a number of events throughout the region- read on for the highlights.

**May:** We helped lay the foundation for a Community Health Navigator to hold hours at the Ayer Library. We explored opportunities for partnership with the Worcester and Middlesex District Attorneys. Jenna offered another Adult Mental Health First Aid certification course, this time in Lunenburg. We provided materials for the Ayer Employee Benefit and Bolton COA Wellness Fairs. We attended the Middlesex DA Opioid Task Force Meeting. Our nurses provided Wellness Checks at Stone Soup Kitchen in Ayer.

**June:** Nurse Alicia tabled at the Lancaster Community Safety & Wellness Festival. Nurse Bridget offered a "Tick Talk" at the Lunenburg Adult Activity Center. We embarked on our first ever region-specific community health needs assessment (continuing through December 2025).

**July:** Our grant funded "Buried in Treasure" Hoarding Support Group series concluded. We met with UMass Memorial Health to identify opportunities for collaboration. We provided them with naloxone, barrier breathing masks, fentanyl test strips, and associated literature.

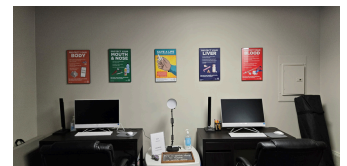
**August:** Jenna tabled at Ashburnham's National Night Out, a fun public health and safety event for all ages. We continued interviewing for our Public Health Nursing Team, and started getting our fall flu clinics set up with our venues and partners.

**Ongoing:** We are supporting a subset of 7 NABH towns who hope to work together collaboratively to address substance use disorder and mental health challenges in their communities. We continue to attend monthly Boxborough Wellbeing meetings, quarterly Groton TRIAD meetings, and host monthly meetings for our region's COA & Outreach Workers. We are partnering with several other organizations to host roundtable conversations with community leaders on healthcare access.



*Note: our town nurse hours have been "paused" for July and August. They will remain "on hold" in September and October while we onboard new nursing team members.*

For an up-to-date list of where we've been and will be in the region, please visit our News & Events page on the web at [www.nashoba.org/news-events](http://www.nashoba.org/news-events). You can also view archived versions of our newsletter while you're there!



**Photos: Top 2- Spotighting the NM Cares Drop-In Center in Townsend, MA from our most recent visit in July! The NM Cares Drop-In Center provides resources for all needing help fighting the battles of addiction and domestic violence in the North Middlesex region. Appointments for recovery coaching and DV counseling are available, as well as a computer lab, and a community space where AA/NA meetings are held. Bottom: Jenna tabling at Ashburnham NNO.**

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## Kids Corner: Online Public Health Games

*Want to learn more about public health, but don't know where to start? Check out these online games! There's something for everyone.*



### Solve the Outbreak- Become a Disease Detective!

**Link:** [www.cdc.gov/digital-social-media-tools/mobile/applications/sto/sto-web.html](http://www.cdc.gov/digital-social-media-tools/mobile/applications/sto/sto-web.html)

**Age suitability:** middle school and up

In this fun and interactive online game from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), your mission, if you choose to accept, is to get clues and analyze data to Solve the Outbreak and save lives. You get to try your hand at becoming a Disease Detective. You'll travel the world chasing outbreaks like the ones real-life CDC Disease Detectives help fight. Should you quarantine the town, send for more lab results, or alert the media? The better your answers, the faster you'll climb the ranks and achieve Disease Detective status! Master Level 1 to unlock even more exciting scenarios and earn honors for your demonstrated expertise!

### Food Hero- Take a Guess Food Trivia

**Link:** [www.foodhero.org/take-a-guess](http://www.foodhero.org/take-a-guess)

**Age suitability:** Ages 4+

Is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable? How high can salmon jump? This online trivia game from Food Hero (a project of the Oregon State University extension) tests your knowledge of uncommon facts regarding common food items!



### Tour of Recycle City

**Link:** [www3.epa.gov/recyclecity/](http://www3.epa.gov/recyclecity/)

**Age suitability:** Grades 2-6

Explore Recycle City to see how the people of the town reduce waste, use less energy, and even save money by doing simple things at home, at work, and in their neighborhoods in this simple interactive activity from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).



**Other sources for online public health games, activities, and more:**

**Health4Kids UK:** [www.healthforkids.co.uk/games/](http://www.healthforkids.co.uk/games/)

**HealthPoweredKids:** [healthpoweredkids.org/](http://healthpoweredkids.org/)

**CDC Public Health Activities for Middle and High School Students:**

[www.cdc.gov/stem/php/student-resources-k12/middle-and-high-school-student.html](http://www.cdc.gov/stem/php/student-resources-k12/middle-and-high-school-student.html)

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## *When is the Nurse in your Neighborhood?*

Town Nurse Hours have been on pause for July and August 2025. **They will remain on pause for September and October as we continue interviewing candidates for our Public Health Nursing team.** Please stay tuned for details on "the plan" for November and December, and in the meantime, please call us at (978) 772-3335 with any Public Health Nursing-related questions or concerns. Thank you for your support! We look forward to getting back out into the community soon.



## TAKE OUR COMMUNITY HEALTH SURVEY TODAY!

Help us understand what our regions' communities need to be healthy and strong.

LEARN MORE AND TAKE SURVEY  
(ALSO AVAILABLE IN ESPAÑOL,  
PORTUGUÊS, AND KREYÒL-  
AYISYEN:)

Enter to  
win one of  
two \$50  
gift cards!

SCAN ME



[www.surveymonkey.com/  
r/D9J8VMR](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/D9J8VMR)



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