

Health & Mental Hygiene News



News You Can Use From the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Accomplishments of the First 100 Days of the Merger

The new Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has already begun to realize some of the synergies promised by the July 1 merger of the Department of Health and the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services. Here are some accomplishments made possible by the merger that illustrate our new agency's potential for tackling issues in innovative ways. *We are:*

1 **Developing a clearer picture of the prevalence and costs of mental illness in New York City.**

Mental illness affects 1 in 5 people nationally and costs about \$79 billion a year in lost productivity and premature death.

Using epidemiologic tools long employed in public health, the Department is taking a comprehensive look at mental illness in New York City, including prevalence and social and economic costs. What we learn will be used to bolster our planning efforts, ensuring that the agency best meets the needs of New Yorkers with mental illness, chemical dependency, mental retardation, and developmental disability.

2 **Helping people with a mental illness, developmental disability, or substance-abuse problem stop smoking.**

Smoking rates among people with mental illness are double those in the general population. Although 70% of smokers want to stop, quitting can be especially hard for people with a mental illness or a substance abuse problem.

The Department will make smoking-cessation information and services available to mental health, mental retardation, and chemical dependency agencies. All providers will prominently display information for clients and ensure that their program sites are non-smoking environments. The Department will offer free training to mental hygiene providers in how best to help clients stop smoking. Agencies will track the smoking status of their clients and help them quit smoking. An issue on treating tobacco addiction of "City Health Information," the Department bulletin for physicians and other health-care providers, will be mailed to all mental hygiene providers.

3 **Making sure that parents of very-low-birthweight babies hear about the Early Intervention Program, which provides services at no cost to the family to help children develop normally.**

Each year, more than 2,000 babies are born in New York City weighing 3.2 pounds or less. These very-low-birthweight babies are at higher risk for developmental problems.

The Department—whose Vital Statistics office receives reports on every birth—is now doing outreach to the parents of very-low-birthweight babies, telling them about evaluation and services for babies with developmental delays offered by the Early Intervention Program at no cost to the family.

Accomplishments *Continued*

4 Helping more of New York City's most vulnerable children and families get health insurance.

Many infants and toddlers in the Early Intervention Program for children with developmental delays have lacked access to an array of health-care services because their families aren't covered by insurance.

Working together, the Department's Early Intervention Program and the Division of Health Care Access and Improvement are identifying every baby in the program not covered by insurance and helping eligible families enroll in Medicaid, Family Health Plus, Child Health Plus, or the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage Program.

5 Enhancing the ongoing dialogue between the Department and external stakeholders.

One of the most critical elements for enhancing government effectiveness is frequent and successful 2-way communication with external groups and individuals.

Through a new effort to internally consolidate all of our mailing and contact lists, and a plan to make the agency Web site more interactive, the Department is building the foundation for more frequent and meaningful communication with external stakeholders. We'll use the consolidated mailing list for the first time when we send out our October Health Alert about flu shots.

6 Screening for mental illness and substance abuse and referring for treatment patients seen at sexually transmitted disease (STD) and tuberculosis (TB) clinics.

People with STDs and TB have a higher risk for depression and other mental illness. They are also at higher risk for substance abuse problems.

All the Department's STD and TB clinics have been provided with educational materials on mental illness. In a pilot program at 2 clinics, the Department has trained staff to screen patients for mental illness and substance abuse. Patients who screen positive are referred for treatment. The program will be expanded to all STD and TB clinics.

7 Preventing and controlling hepatitis in people who abuse substances.

Substance abusers have a disproportionately high risk of hepatitis.

The Department has launched a pilot project at 4 chemical dependency treatment programs to prevent hepatitis infection and ensure treatment for people who are already infected. The programs are receiving free hepatitis B vaccine and patient-education materials, and staff are being trained in hepatitis counseling and testing. Clients who test positive are referred to treatment.

8 Improving communication among our own staff and programs.

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has nearly 6,000 employees working in dozens of locations throughout the five boroughs.

We've consolidated the e-mail systems used by the former Departments and provided nearly all employees with Internet access and a standardized set of computer tools.

**For more information about the
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene,
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