



# Town of Darien

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## Health Department Annual Report 2014 – 2015

The mission of the Health Department is to *prevent* disease and illness by *promoting* a safe community and healthy environment to all residents and visitors, while upholding public health based regulations which *protect* the quality of life. It is our goal to provide residents with timely and accurate responses to any questions or service requests pertaining to environmental and public health. In addition to the flu prevention program, the Department inspects all food facilities, all beauty salons, monitors our beach water and responds to various concerns raised by the public as they pertain to public health. The Health Department website ([www.darienhealth.com](http://www.darienhealth.com)) contains guidance and advice on many topics, including preparing for emergencies. Some specific activities and highlights from the past year include:

### Beaches, Pools and Recreational Water Quality

This department collected water samples at Pear Tree Point and Weed Beaches weekly from Memorial Day through Labor Day. These samples were submitted to the Stamford Health Department laboratory to be tested for bacteria. The purpose of the testing is to ensure that the water conforms to the public health safety standards established by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. There are two sampling stations at Weed Beach and three stations at Pear Tree Point.

In addition to water sampling, this department monitors rainfall amounts during the season and has established a protocol of notifying the Parks and Recreation Department to close the beaches for swimming when over one (1) inch of rainfall occurs in a 24 hour period. This policy is consistent with that of other communities along the shoreline. Water sampling and testing conducted by this office over the past several years has confirmed that bacteria levels exceed state standards during and immediately after such rainfall events confirming the basis for restricting the public from swimming at those times. Based on these parameters, there were NO beach closures due to elevated bacteria counts but there were three days of swimming restrictions associated with rainfall events over one (1) inch. The telephone HOTLINE (203-656-7323) provides up-to-date information regarding the status of our beaches during the summer.

### Additional Water Quality Studies:

- This Department partnered with HarborWatch from Westport in a water quality study of Holly Pond. This included testing water from storm drain outlets and stream flow for possible sewage discharges and other possible sources of contamination. This study has identified two storm drain outlets that need further evaluation, but the water quality in the Pond consistently met bacteriological standards for swimming.
- We have successfully partnered with the Westport/Weston and East Shore Health Districts in applying for and receiving a grant to fund a DNA source tracking study for bacteria entering Long Island Sound. In Darien, the Goodwives River will be evaluated to identify precisely the sources of bacteria that impact our waters after rainfall; whether it is human, wildlife, birds or just general urban runoff. This study is expected to be completed by the end of 2016 and will greatly assist in evaluating the potential health risks posed by elevated bacteria levels after a rainfall and what steps may be taken to reduce those numbers.

### **Public Pools**

State law considers private clubs and condominium associations with swimming pools to be “public pools” and subject to annual permits and inspection by the Health Department. In Darien, there are ten different locations with a total of sixteen “public pools.” A key component of the permit program is the requirement that someone knowledgeable in pool water chemistry and filtration is responsible for ensuring safe conditions and adequate water quality for each facility at all times that the pool is open. All facilities were regularly inspected during the summer and found to be safe, meeting water quality standards for pH and chlorine disinfection levels and generally in excellent condition.

### **Complaint Investigations**

The Health Department continues to respond to complaints involving restaurants, housing, heating, mold and mildew problems, noise, insects, rodent infestations, trash, drinking water concerns, drainage, blighted properties, neighborhood odors, pollution concerns of all kinds and general nuisance situations.

### **Flu Prevention Program**

This department offered five (5) open clinics for flu vaccine; one in conjunction with our first Health Fair at the Mather Center, two at the Senior Center, one for town employees and a “Vote & Vax” held on Election Day in the Town Hall auditorium. In addition, we offer an on-line scheduler at [www.darienhealth.com](http://www.darienhealth.com) which residents can utilize to secure an appointment with our Public Health nurse.

In 2014 - 2015, 333 individuals were vaccinated compared with 268 in the previous year. The increase may be attributed to the convenience offered by the Mather Center and a corresponding increase in the number of open clinics. A “high dose” vaccine formulated specially for seniors was available and all vaccines offered are preservative free.

### **Food Protection Program**

There are 148 permitted food service establishments in Darien, ranging from elegant banquet facilities to school cafeterias, seasonal “snack bars”, mobile vendors and temporary events. In 2014-15, the Department conducted over 500 inspections of these facilities to ensure food safety. The Department issues a rating of “Good”, “Fair” or “Poor” for full service restaurants in conjunction with conditions found each inspection. The Rating program, intended to inform the public about observed conditions and food handling practices within the establishment, takes into account the establishment’s inspection history as well as most current observations. Ratings are available on-line at [www.darienct.com](http://www.darienct.com) and should be visible to patrons in the facility.

Monthly training program for food handlers employed in Darien food service facilities are presented by Health Department staff. This course was created to meet the State mandated requirement that food service facilities offer training programs to employees and is tailored to address those deficiencies commonly found during inspections. Those who pass the exam after the session receive “Approved Food Handler” cards. Ninety two individuals attended these sessions in the past year.

A multi-lingual on-line training program is now available on our website and may also be accessed directly at [www.Darien.statefoodsafety.com](http://www.Darien.statefoodsafety.com) . This self-paced session is intended to address the needs of those who may be deficient in English, since we have found these individuals have significantly higher failure rates at our standard training session.

### **Health and Wellness**

Elaine, the Office Administrator for both the Health Department and Human Services, is setting a standard for good health and fitness in many ways. One aspect of her fitness regimen is that she walks every day during lunch, usually over two miles. A Health Department “TWITTER” account ([www.twitter.com/darienhealth](http://www.twitter.com/darienhealth)) has been established to track her workout and provide a reference point for others to join in the challenge. Anyone can post their daily walk and join in the fun. Let’s see if we can “Keep up with Elaine”!

The renewal for Darien's "HeartSafe Community" designation was approved by the State Health Department for the third time. This designation is effective for three years and represents a state-wide recognition of the town's commitment to provide high levels of emergency cardiac response and interventions. We continue to see an increase in numbers of Darien residents trained in CPR and in the availability of AEDs, both of which save lives.

### **Health Needs Assessment**

The State Department of Public Health has awarded a three year grant which will be utilized to perform a "health needs assessment" for the Town over the next year. This is the first step in achieving national accreditation for the Darien Health Department by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) and is a critical component of assessing what the actual health needs of the community are and then taking action to meet those needs.

### **Mosquitos and Ticks**

The State maintains two mosquito trapping stations in Darien for the collection and testing of mosquitos. As of October, 2015, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station tested 11,034 mosquito pools from Darien and seven (7) were found to be positive for West Nile Virus. Most mosquitos trapped were salt marsh mosquitos which do not transmit disease. There have been no reported illnesses from West Nile Virus in Darien.

The Health Department accepts ticks from residents and submits them to the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station for testing at no charge. In 2014-15, 87 "ticks" were submitted and fourteen (14) were found to be positive. Only fifty (50) of the specimens submitted were tested either because they were not deer ticks or they did not meet the guidelines established for testing. If the lab determines the tick has not been engorged with blood, testing is not done because Lyme Disease transmission could not have occurred. The percentage of positive ticks found in Darien is consistent with that found in neighboring communities. Free tick removal kits are available in Health Department offices.

### **Public Health and Emergency Preparedness**

Darien was at the forefront of Connecticut policy development and response to Ebola. At JFK Airport, CDC screening identified a resident returning from one of the affected countries in Africa and an "Order of Quarantine" was issued by the State Health Department. While communicating with State Health Department epidemiologists, we regularly met with the First Selectman and other town officials and emergency responders as policy decisions and procedures were being developed to protect residents. Fortunately, the individual involved was very cooperative and after review of the potential exposure, the quarantine order was lifted by the State.

### **Rabies**

The Health Department and the Darien Animal Control Officer collaborate to collect and submit animals to the Connecticut State Department of Public Health Laboratory for testing if there is a possibility of human exposure to rabies. In 2014-15, nineteen (19) animals were tested with one positive result. Testing animals suspected of having rabies is important since rapid treatment of the exposed individuals is completely effective in preventing an otherwise fatal illness.

### **Radon**

Free Radon test kits continue to be available to Darien residents with advisory information on the risks posed by radon. While four years of test results do not indicate any "hotspots" or areas of concern in town, residents are advised to test their homes during the heating season every few years.

### **Recreational Shellfishing**

The Health Department issued 65 Annual Permits to individuals for recreational shellfishing in 2014-2015 as compared to 48 issued the previous year. Shellfishing rules and guidelines together with maps of approved shellfishing areas are provided to permit holders. The telephone HOTLINE (203-838-9807)

provides information regarding any shellfish bed closures due to contaminated waters or excessive precipitation.

### **Reportable Illnesses**

Reports from doctors' offices and laboratories are submitted to this office and follow-up investigations are performed by our Public Health Nurse as needed. The lab reports are essential in monitoring trends in reportable diseases that may be occurring. The top four laboratory confirmed reportable diseases for the past three years have been:

- 1) Influenza .....50 (2014-15); 33 (2013-14); 53 (2012-13)
- 2) Chlamydia (and other STDs) ..... 20.....26.....13.....
- 3) Lyme (and other tick diseases)... 11..... 18.....15.....
- 4) Hepatitis C .....17.....12 .....13.....

### **Salons**

Due to the evolving nature of this service industry, the Department updated previous health regulations pertaining to these facilities. There are currently 24 permitted facilities in Town which are inspected at least twice a year by Health Department personnel. Customers and clients should take note of the "Certificate of Inspection" issued by this Department which signifies the establishment conforms with health department requirements.

### **Septic Systems and Private Wells**

Many properties in Darien have on-site wastewater disposal and potable water supply systems. The Health Department follows a detailed plan review and inspection process whenever homes with septic systems and/or wells are built, remodeled or reconstructed. In the past year, the Health Department performed soil testing to determine site suitability for new or replacement septic systems at 32 sites, reviewed 36 engineered plans and issued permits for the installation of 31 septic systems. Evaluations of site suitability for additions were performed for 41 locations, while 14 well drilling permits, mostly for geothermal wells, were issued.

### **Well Water Survey for Pesticides**

Due to the discovery of chlordane and dieldrin in private wells in nearby Stamford, and concerns of arsenic and uranium in wells scattered throughout Connecticut, the CT DPH offered laboratory services for a limited survey of private wells. Nineteen (19) private wells were sampled in Darien and no elevated levels of any of the contaminants of concern were found.

### **Unwanted Prescription Medication Disposal Program**

A special drop-box for the collection and disposal of unwanted, expired medication is now available to the public at all times in the lobby of the Darien Police Station. This "no-questions asked" collection program is for medication only and no household waste or needles may be placed into the box. Over the past year, the Police Department reports that 480 pounds of meds were collected, more than double of what was disposed of in the previous year. This method of safely disposing unwanted medication helps keep drugs out of the hands of those who may misuse them while protecting the environment.

### **Website**

The Health Department website <http://darienhealth.com> is regularly revised and updated to serve as a timely informational resource for our residents. The website features current information on health issues, emergency preparedness and application forms for permits as well as the schedule for flu prevention clinics sponsored by the Department. All restaurant inspection "Ratings" are available for viewing as well as an on-line scheduler to enable residents to make appointments for flu vaccinations. This year, "Twitter" ([www.twitter.com/darienhealth](http://www.twitter.com/darienhealth)) has been added to our on-line presence.