



Town of Darien

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Health Department

Health Department Annual Report 2015 – 2016

The mission of the Health Department is to prevent disease and illness by promoting a safe community and healthy environment for all residents and visitors while upholding public health based regulations that protect the quality of life. It is the Department's goal to offer progressive public health programs and initiatives as well as timely and accurate responses to questions or service requests pertaining to environmental and public health. Programs and initiatives addressed in 2015 – 16 include the following:

Beaches and Recreational Water Quality

The Health Department collected water samples at Pear Tree Point and Weed Beaches weekly from Memorial Day through Labor Day. The purpose of the testing was to ensure that the water quality conforms to the public health safety standards established by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. 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 more than one inch of rain occurs in a 24 hour period. This policy is consistent with that of other shoreline communities.

Over the last year, (2015-16), as in the previous eight years, there were NO beach closures due to elevated bacteria counts. There was one day of swimming restrictions at town beaches due to a rainfall event over one inch. The Beaches telephone HOTLINE (203-656-7323) provides up-to-date information regarding the status of our beaches during the summer months.

Water Quality Study of Goodwives River:

- In January, 2016, the Health Department began a DNA source tracking study, the purpose of which is to evaluate the sources of bacteria that impact Goodwives River after rainfall. This study, which involves the monthly collection of water samples from the River, will be completed in 2017. The DNA extracted from the bacteria in the water sample is expected to indicate the source of bacteria as either from human, wildlife, birds or general urban runoff. This information will greatly assist in evaluating the potential health risks posed by elevated bacteria levels found after a rainfall and can help us to determine steps that may be taken to reduce water quality risk.

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 locations with a total of sixteen public pools. All facilities were regularly inspected during the last year and found to be safe, meeting water quality standards and generally in excellent condition.

Complaint Investigations

The Health Department continues to respond to and resolve 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. There were 32 such situations investigated in 2015-16.

Emergency Preparedness

The Department participates in monthly regional meetings to continue refining and improving cooperative relationships with surrounding communities in our plans for responding to emergency situations.

Flu Prevention Program

The Health Department offered four open clinics for flu vaccine; one in conjunction with our second Health Fair at the Mather Center, two at the Senior Center, 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 which residents can utilize to secure an appointment with our Public Health nurse. Last year, 296 individuals were vaccinated compared with 333 in the previous year. A “high dose” vaccine formulated specially for seniors was available. All vaccines offered are preservative free.

Food Protection Program

There are 158 permitted food service establishments in Darien, ranging from elegant banquet facilities to school cafeterias, seasonal “snack bars”, mobile vendors and temporary events. In 2015-16, 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 during each inspection. Ratings are available on-line at www.darienhealth.com and ratings must be visible to patrons in the dining facility.

The Department offers two educational opportunities for food handlers employed in Darien food service facilities. There is a monthly training program offered by Health Department staff and a multi-lingual on-line training program available on our website or www.Darien.statefoodsafety.com . Both programs are intended to address deficiencies commonly found during inspections. Last year, 54 individuals attended the training program presented by staff and another 57 took the on-line course.

Health Needs Assessment

The Department has been collecting data necessary to complete a “health needs assessment” for the Town. This is the first step in achieving national accreditation for the Darien Health Department by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). More importantly, it is a critical component of assessing what the actual health needs of the community are so policies to meet those needs can be considered and implemented.

Health Wellness and Prevention Programs

- Asthma: In conjunction with the “Putting on Airs” program and Stamford Hospital, this office provided guidance to residents seeking advice on addressing chronic asthma problems and eliminating asthma triggers in the home. Thus far, we have investigated and provided assistance to one family. Referrals are being made to discharged patients at Stamford Hospital and clinics that partner with “Putting on Airs”.
- Skin Cancer Prevention: “Don’t Fry Day” is a public information program focused on skin cancer prevention. Pamphlets (see the attachment) were designed and distributed to residents obtaining beach stickers, shellfishing permits and fishing licenses. Posters were placed at public pools, country clubs, as well as our parks and beaches.
- The Department participated in opioid abuse prevention activities and interventions throughout the community and organized on-going educational and public education forums.

Mosquitos and Ticks

The State maintains two mosquito trapping stations in Darien for the collection and testing of mosquitos. As of October, 2016, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station tested 14,914 mosquito pools from Darien and seven were found to be positive for West Nile Virus. There have been no reported illnesses from West Nile Virus in Darien. Additionally, there was no Zika activity found in the mosquitos tested, nor were there any reported positive cases of Zika in the community.

The Health Department accepts ticks from residents and submits them to the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station for testing at no charge. Last year, 120 ticks were submitted and fifteen of those tested were found to be positive for the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. Since only deer ticks transmit Lyme Disease, no other ticks are tested. Also, if the lab determines the tick was not 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.

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 2015-16, fourteen 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 with advisory information on the risks posed by radon continue to be available to Darien residents. While five 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 51 Annual Permits to individuals for recreational shellfishing in 2015-2016 as compared to 65 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

A mandated responsibility of the Health Department is to monitor reportable diseases and conditions as defined by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. Over the years, the most frequently reported condition has always been influenza. However, in 2015-16, sexually transmitted diseases, especially Chlamydia, have become the number one reportable condition.

- 1) Chlamydia (and other STDs).....30
- 2) Influenza.....12
- 3) Campylobacteriosis.....8
- 4) Salmonellosis.....6

The last two categories are usually food related illnesses; however, since the incidents were randomly distributed over the year, illness cannot be attributed to a common source. Follow-ups conducted by our nurse indicated that many of these isolated cases were associated with travel, often to foreign countries.

Salons

There are currently 25 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 to health department requirements. Inspection reports for each facility are now available on-line.

Septic Systems and Private Wells

Many properties in Darien have on-site wastewater disposal (septic systems) and potable water supply systems (wells). 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 27 sites, reviewed 36 engineered plans and issued permits for the installation of 18 septic systems. Evaluations of site suitability for additions were performed for 40 locations, while 11 well drilling permits, mostly for geothermal wells, were issued.

Social Media

The Health Department website <http://darienhealth.com> is regularly revised and updated to serve as a timely informational resource for Darien 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. Food service establishment inspection reports and ratings are available for on-line viewing as are the inspection reports for salons. For convenience, the website offers a scheduler to enable residents to make appointments for flu vaccinations. This year, "Twitter" has been added to our on-line presence (www.twitter.com/darienhealth).

Unwanted Prescription Medication Disposal Program: "A Ton of Drugs!"

Darien began participating in the unwanted drug disposal program in 2010 and installed the 24/7 collection box in the Police Department lobby in 2012. In June of 2016, the 2000 pound mark for disposed medication was reached in Darien. That is a "*Ton of Drugs!*" safely disposed that could have ended up in the wrong hands or been improperly discarded. Outreach programs to better inform the public that this service exists as well as meeting with local pharmacies and doctors' offices to provide additional information to customers and patients are on-going.

(Submitted 11-28-16, D. Knauft)