

Polk County

Public Health Department



COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION
PUBLIC HEALTH

2023

Annual Report

MESSAGE FROM THE HEALTH OFFICER

Dear Administrator Norby, County Board Members, Board of Health and Human Services Members, Colleagues, Partners, and Citizens:

We are proud to present the Polk County Health Department 2023 Annual Report on behalf of all Public Health employees. This report highlights a portion of the work that is completed in Public Health to protect and promote the health of all people in Polk County.

In 2023, Polk County Public Health completed the WI DHS Chapter 140 review and has been re-certified as a level III health department. WI administrative code 140 specifies the requirements of a health department, and this review occurs every 5 years. Some of the requirements of a Level III Health Dept includes:

- Providing the following services: communicable disease/chronic disease & injury prevention, environmental public health, maternal child family health, and access to or linkage with clinical health care
- Serving the community as health strategists by leading data collection and sharing research and public health expertise
- Advocating for policies addressing social determinants of health
- Maintaining a performance management and quality improvement plan

Becoming re-certified as level III speaks to the hard work, dedication, and resiliency of the Polk County Health Department team as we navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing changes, and rebuilding challenges over the last 5 years. Moving forward, we use the Public Health Accreditation Board's "Foundational Public Health Services" and Polk County Community Services Division's Mission, Vision, and Values to guide the work that we do. Polk County Public Health is continuing our work to prevent injury/illness and promote wellbeing in 2024.

Sincerely,



Helen Swanson, MS
Public Health Director



Tonya Eichel, CSW, MPA
Community Services Division Director and Health Officer

Mission

Partnering with our community to promote and protect health and well-being



Vision

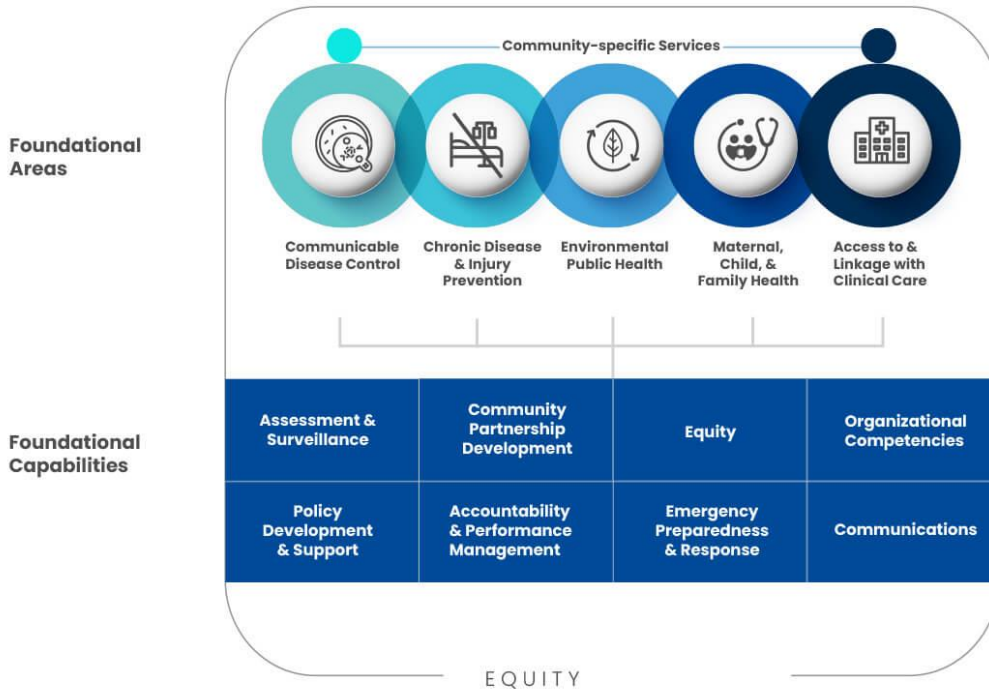
A safe and healthy community for all



COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION

Behavioral Health • Public Health • Children & Families
Economic Support • Business Services

Foundational Public Health Services



COMMUNITY SPECIFIC SERVICES

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

As one of the community specific services, communicable disease control plays an important role in the day-to-day workload of the Polk County Health Department (PCHD). It is important to investigate and manage the spread of disease to control outbreaks. Disease investigation or case surveillance is initiated when public health agencies are notified of a disease or condition that poses a serious health threat. Diseases and conditions that must be reported are based on [DHS statutes](#). There are approximately 100 diseases that are considered reportable.

Case surveillance includes gathering information on who is affected (including demographic, clinical, and epidemiologic characteristics), where they are located (where the disease may have been contracted and current location of patient for potential exposure risks), and how they are affected (symptoms, etc.). See Figure 1 for specifics on the quantity and types of cases Polk County investigated in recent years.

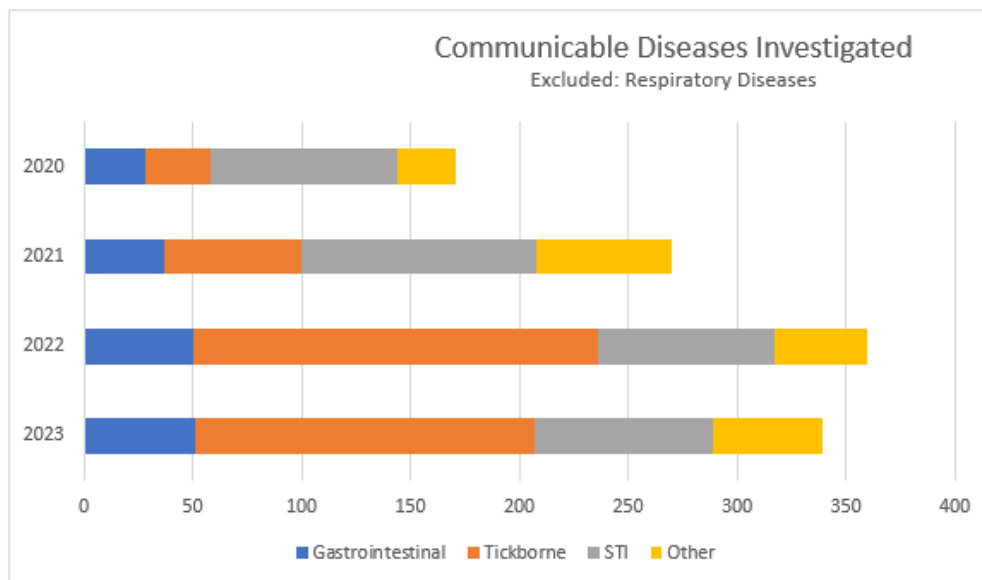


Figure 1 Number of communicable disease cases investigated in Polk County between 2020 and 2023.

Respiratory disease reporting criteria changed several times throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and into 2023. ** in table 2 indicates stats that were not reported at that time. This table only includes diseases that were reported through WEDSS.

Table 1 Respiratory diseases investigated between 2020 and 2023

Disease	2020	2021	2022	2023
Covid-19	1475	7793	5750	1167
Covid-19 hospitalizations	**	**	**	22
Influenza	**	29	6	348
Influenza hospitalizations	**	1	9	2
RSV	**	**	**	0
RSV hospitalizations	**	**	**	2

The PCHD is enrolled in the federal Vaccine for Children (VFC) program. The VFC program helps provide vaccines to children whose parents or guardian are unable to afford them. Vaccines available through the VFC program are recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice (ACIP). These vaccines protect babies, young children, and adolescents from 16 diseases. A child is eligible for the VFC program if they are younger than 19 years of age and is one of the following:

- Medicaid eligible
- Uninsured
- Underinsured
- American Indian or Alaska Native

Similarly, the PCHD is also enrolled in the federal Vaccine for Adults (VFA) program. The VFA program helps uninsured and underinsured adults get their vaccinations. In 2023, there were on-site flu clinics in which those who qualify for the VFA program were able to schedule their flu vaccine. We are hoping to expand the outreach of this program to better serve our community in the future.

Part of the focus for our immunization program is on our 24-month-old children. The Polk County 2023 vaccination rate for this population was 55% which is down from 58% in 2022. The PCHD implemented a new notification system in 2023, called

Televox. This system sends out reminders to the parents/guardians of the children who may be behind

Table 2 Type and number of vaccines given in 2022 and 2023.

Vaccine	2022	2023
Covid-19	749	0
DtaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Acellular Pertussis)	0	2
Dtap/IPV	0	2
Dtap/IPV/Hep B	0	1
Flu (Influenza)	429	659
HBV (Hepatitis B)	1	0
Hep A	2	0
Hep A/Hep B	0	0
HIB (Haemophilus Influenzae b)	0	1
HPV (Human Papillomavirus)	0	0
IPV (Inactivated Polio Vaccine)	0	1
MCV4 (Meningococcal)	2	0
MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella)	1	2
PCV13 (Prevnar)	0	2
Rotavirus	0	2
Tdap	29	10
VZV (Varicella)	0	2

on vaccinations. We are hoping that the implementation of this new system will positively impact our up-to-date percentage in 2024.

Every fall, the PCHD coordinates a vaccine clinic at each of the eight schools in our district. Information is sent to each of the schools to share with families regarding the opportunity to have their child vaccinated for Influenza. All eight schools participated, and 639 flu vaccines were given. This year, unlike previous years, we documented each vaccination using our new Electronic Health Record system Patagonia.

The PCHD’s Reproductive Health program aims to educate and support clients to make healthy choices by reducing sexually transmitted infection exposure and unintended pregnancies. The program offers confidential services for various contraceptives, pregnancy testing, STI testing and treatment, and express enrollment in Medicaid “Family Planning Only” insurance. Rebuilding the program was the focus of 2023. Services were limited due to staffing capacity and rebuilding community trust and awareness. We were able to partner with Barron and St. Croix County to cover client needs when we were unable to provide services.

Table 3 Services provided by the Reproductive Health team

Type of service	Quantity
Contraceptives prescribed	2
Pregnancy tests	4
STI tests	3
Partner Therapy (EPT)	2

Table 4 STIs separated by ages

Disease	≤18 years (2022)	All Ages (2022)	≤18 years (2023)	All Ages (2023)
Chlamydia	13	67	17	75
Gonorrhea	1	6	1	7
Syphilis	--	12	--	11
HIV	--	1	--	Pending
Partner/Referral Program (Contacts)	--	0	--	2

CHRONIC DISEASE AND INJURY PREVENTION

POWER OF PRODUCE

The PCHD aims to assist with chronic disease and injury prevention in our community. One of the programs that focuses on teaching community members how to make healthy choices is the Power of Produce (PoP). PoP is a farmer’s markets incentive program for youth. Each week, children ages 4 to 17 receive tokens to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables. PoP aims to increase family participation at farmers markets, increase vendor revenue, reduce barriers to families having fresh fruits and vegetables, educate children about the importance of these items in their diet, and build healthier communities. This year we partnered with Amery Hospital and Clinic, St. Croix Health, and Osceola Medical Center, St. Croix Valley Food Alliance, St. Croix Valley Food Bank, and UW-Extension. In 2023, the PoP program had:

- 4 Farmers Market locations
- 1166 participants in the program

- \$5920 as the total cost of tokens redeemed by participants

LEAD PREVENTION

The PCHD operates a lead poisoning prevention program to alleviate the harm caused by lead exposure which usually affects children under six years old. PCHD receives alerts that are greater or equal to 3.5ug/dl. Confirmatory tests are then requested and if they come back above the 3.5 ug/dl threshold, education is provided to the family regarding cleaning of home, resources for mitigation, and foods to help prevent lead uptake in the body. If the confirmatory lead level is above 20ug/dl, our lead assessor will visit the house to collect samples for testing. After testing is complete, mitigation will occur, and the lead assessor will return when work is completed to clear the house so the family may return home.

Table 5 Lead services provided in 2023

Service provided	Quantity
Initial Lead Screening	521
Case Management	26
Homes mitigated	1

SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION

The substance use prevention team was created in 2023. This team brings the efforts of the individuals that are working on different aspects of this focus all into one group to collaborate with each other, in the hopes of reducing duplicated efforts and more brainstorming opportunities. This group covers the Western Wisconsin Tobacco-Free Alliance (WWTFA), Drug Free Communities Grant, State Opioid Response Grant, and our NARCAN® Direct Program.

The mission of WWTFA is to prevent, reduce exposure to, and eliminate the use of tobacco and nicotine products in Barron, Burnett, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Rusk and St. Croix counties through policy work, education, and informational/service efforts. WWTFA strives to create healthy lifestyles, and tobacco-free communities for all by increasing public awareness of the health risks, how tobacco companies target certain populations and initiating policy change through education. In 2023, the staff working with WWTFA:

- Sent out 15 vape disposal boxes throughout the alliance counties
- Distributed 9 mini grants across Alliance Counties to help expand youth and young adult tobacco prevention and cessation work through education, policy, and community awareness campaigns.

The Drug Free Communities Grant is a Federal Prevention Grant that focuses on preventing youth grades 6-12 from misusing substances. In 2023, the focus was to get a better working coalition that had community members that were participating. There were 4 community listening sessions with the purpose of gaining insight into what the community wanted/needed. There are now regular meetings with community members that make up this coalition.

The State Opioid Response Grant is intended to provide education and resources to decrease the harm caused by Opioids in our community. We used this grant opportunity to distribute Deterra medication disposal kits and lockboxes to safely store medications.

- Number of Deterra distributed - 1400

- Number of Lockboxes distributed - 125

Compliance checks are operations in which an underage individual attempts to purchase a substance using their standard ID. For tobacco compliance checks, the individuals are age 16 or 17. For alcohol checks, the individuals are between 18 and 20 years old. Of the 13 underage alcohol sales, 10 IDs were checked before still selling to the minors. See total sales attempted and completed in Table 6.

Table 6 Total compliance check sales attempted and completed in 2023

Type of Check	Sales Completed	Total Sales Attempted
Tobacco Compliance Check	3	57
Alcohol Compliance Check	13	38

The mission of the NARCAN® Direct Program is to promote awareness about opioid use disorder, educate community members about the dangers of opioids, and improve access to harm reduction initiatives including how to administer NARCAN® nasal spray to an individual experiencing a suspected opioid overdose. In 2023, a website form was created to give the public a way to reach out for training needs and/or refills of Narcan. Kits that included Narcan were created and implemented for Community Services Division staff to use when going out in the community. PCHD trained 233 people and distributed 223 kits in 2023.

ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH

Our Environmental Health program is very versatile. PCHD is an agent for WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) regarding licensing of local food establishments, schools, recreational water facilities, campgrounds, recreational camps, tattoo/body piercing, and lodging. The goal of this program is to assure food safety as well as clean and safe establishments for the public.

The PCHD Environmental Health team is also an agent for the WI Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to investigate and test transient non-community (TNC) wells in Polk County. The program requires an annual test for bacteria and nitrate for any well that has public access to water for at least 25 individuals at least 60 days of the year. For this program, we test TNC wells in both Polk and Burnett Counties. Previously, outside labs were utilized to test these samples before reporting the results to the DNR. However, in 2023 PCHD established a water laboratory that can test for bacteria and nitrates in-house. We are now able to test TNC well water and as well as fee for testing water samples from community members' private wells.

Table 7 Total number of inspections completed in 2023

Organization type	# inspected yearly
Food Establishments (including schools)	370
DPI Schools	19
Recreational Water Facilities	21
Campgrounds	34
Rec-Ed Camps	4
Lodging Establishments	178
Tattoo/Body Art Establishments	6

TNC Wells to sample/inspect (Polk & Burnett)	354
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PCHD is also the local Radon Information Center (RIC). As such, we monitor trends of radon levels in homes in Polk, Burnett, Washburn, and Douglas Counties by offering radon test kits and by analyzing the results and giving suggestions to the public.

Table 8 Total number of tests received/completed in 2023

Type of tests	Quantity
Radon Test Kits Provided as RIC	~80
Private Bacteria Well Water Tests Completed	115
Private Nitrate Well Water Tests Completed	65

MATERNAL, CHILD, AND FAMILY HEALTH

During 2023, our MCH program increased awareness of developmental screenings in our Birth to 5-year-old populations. The primary goals of the program included: increasing developmental screenings and services, increasing access to appropriate preventative medical services, and decreasing prenatal alcohol, drug, and tobacco exposure. In 2023, 11 community and staff members were trained on ASQ-3 and M-CHAT for developmental screenings. The Well-Child group was created to pull together different programs within the department to develop messaging and resource materials for families surrounding, vaccines, reproductive health, lead, WIC, Developmental screenings, Birth to 3 and communicable diseases.

BIRTH TO 3

The Birth to 3 Program is for children between the ages of birth to 36 months. Eligibility is based on a diagnosed disability or significant delay in one or more areas of development; Cognitive, Motor, Adaptive, Social and Emotional, or Communication. Birth to 3 services includes family services coordination, special instruction, parent education, vision instruction, hearing services, assistive technology, and referral to community resources and therapy services, which may include physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech/language therapy.

Table 9 Birth to 3 families served in 2023

Year	Referrals	Newly Enrolled	Not Eligible / Family Declined	Referred to schools for continued services	Total families served
2023	132	68	64	14	103

WIC

Women, Infants, Children (WIC) is a supplemental foods program that provides nutrition education to pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and children up to age 5. After several years of planning and preparation, in September 2023 four counties agreed to merge their WIC programs in January 2024. The merger involved Polk, Burnett, Washburn, and Sawyer counties with Polk County being the fiscal agent for the program. Combining the WIC programs will provide greater access to nutrition and breastfeeding services for low-income families in the area by offering more flexible hours. In Polk County, \$378,779.58 of WIC dollars were spent at local stores. See the table below for more information about 2023 participation and enrollment – tracking data is available beginning in March 2023.

Table 10 WIC participation in 2023

Month	Participating	Enrolled	% No Show
March	450	478	6.5
April	442	476	7.1
May	438	475	7.7
June	441	474	6.9
July	456	478	4.6
August	488	502	2.7
September	488	508	3.9
October	474	508	6.6
November	465	507	8.2
December	458	492	6.9

ACCESS TO AND LINKAGE WITH CLINICAL CARE

The Wisconsin Well Woman Program is funded by the Center for Disease Control and is administered by Wisconsin DHS. This program helps women 40-64 years of age who have little, or no health insurance to access screening for breast and cervical cancer. Polk County is a regional coordinating agency for Barron, Burnett, Douglas, Polk, Rusk, and Washburn counties. In 2023, there were 8 women enrolled in our Well Woman Program. We also had 12 women enroll in the Wisconsin Well Woman MA program and 5 continued their enrollment into 2024.

FOUNDATIONAL CAPABILITIES

Of the eight Foundational Capabilities of Public Health that are continuously addressed Polk County chose to explore two more deeply during 2023. Emergency Preparedness remains a focus from year to year to ensure we are prepared to assist the community in a time of need. Community Partnership Development has been a recent focus to rebuild the trust that was lost during the pandemic and increased turnover in recent years.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

The Polk County Public Health Department is a member of a regional consortium known as the Western Wisconsin Public Health Readiness Consortium (WWPHRC). Established in 2003, with funds from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the WWPHRC was established to develop core expertise and preparedness in response to bioterrorism, infectious disease outbreaks, and other public health threats. This is accomplished through networking, coordinating, standardizing, and centralizing

our resources and planning efforts among the fifteen local public and tribal agency partners in Western Wisconsin. Some achievements for the preparedness program in 2023 included:

- 50 Insect Repellent Kits Distributed to the public during tick season.
- 7 New staff trained in FEMA's Incident Command System 100, 200, 700, and 800 courses
- Provided mask fit-testing for 30 nursing home staff.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Polk County's Public Health Department worked with the other directors in the Community Services Division to coordinate meetings with crucial community partners. The goal was information sharing on both sides, to provide transparency for any needs that were not currently being met, and to identify opportunities for future collaboration. These meetings included 8 local school districts, 3 medical systems, local law enforcement agencies, St. Croix Tribe, Northwood Technical College, North Lakes Community Clinic, Mental Health Task Force of Polk County, Family Resource Center of St. Croix Valley, and UW-Extension. These meetings were successful in identifying improvement in the referral process to connect individuals to resources and care, increasing awareness of local services currently available, and laying the foundation for ongoing collaboration and communication.

For more information on PCHD's programs and services, please visit: [Welcome to Polk County \(revize.com\)](https://www.revize.com)