

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: Fall (November) 2025

Fall 2025

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November is Diabetes Awareness Month



Above Photo: Autumn river scene in Ashby by Bridgette Pontbriand, NABH Senior Food Inspector

It's officially "the season of the sticks" in New England- goodbye, leaves and foliage, 'til next year! Regardless of how you feel about shorter days and colder temps, keeping yourself and your loved ones healthy and safe is just as important this time of year as any other. Specific things to focus on include: seasonal illness (more info on page 3,) holiday food safety (see page 4, or 7 for a kid-friendly spin;), and winter weather preparedness (page 2). Exciting things are happening: We are thrilled to welcome Susie Thompson, RN, to the Public Health Nursing Team, and Kathryn Witherow to the agency as our new Shared Services Coordinator. She will be helping us coordinate our activities under the Public Health Excellence program and lending her expertise to our community partnership-building activities, which will be ramping up this coming year! We are looking forward to getting the results of our community health assessment, sharing out the results, and collaborating with partners to improve the health of 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.



Be Ready! Winter Weather



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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. Staffing updates: We are excited to welcome Public Health Nurse Susie Thompson, RN, to our team! We hope to have one additional full-time Public Health Nurse position filled shortly. Town Nurse Hours are still “paused” through the month of November, and we have made the decision to keep Town Nurse Hours paused through December 2025 while we re-staff our Public Health Nursing Department. We hope to return to this community health programming in early 2026! 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.”



HEALTHY HABITS

Help protect yourself and your family from illnesses this respiratory season by **getting your updated vaccines** and following **healthy habits**.



Get your updated flu and COVID-19 vaccines



Stay **home** if you're sick



Cover coughs and sneezes



Wash your hands regularly



Wear a mask if you have mild symptoms or are recovering

For more information, visit www.mass.gov/info-details/protect-yourself-and-others-from-getting-sick

2025 Vaccine Clinic Overview

This year, we partnered with Westminster Pharmacy for our regional vaccine clinics, offering Flu, COVID, and RSV vaccines. Ayer-Pepperell Family Pharmacy provided additional clinic coverage throughout the region, and some of our towns partnered with other pharmacies to offer clinics. We are fortunate to have such robust vaccine availability in our region, and it wouldn't happen without many hands!

Number of NABH Regional Clinics: 11

Vaccines Given: 1,498 (934 flu, 547 COVID, 17 RSV)

Total Clinic Attendees: 1,019

 Harvard was the busiest clinic! 206 attendees, 320 vaccines given

Thank you to our volunteers- Cindy, Leanna, Jean, Rosemary, and Molly, as well as all of our community partners, for making this year's vaccine clinic season a success!

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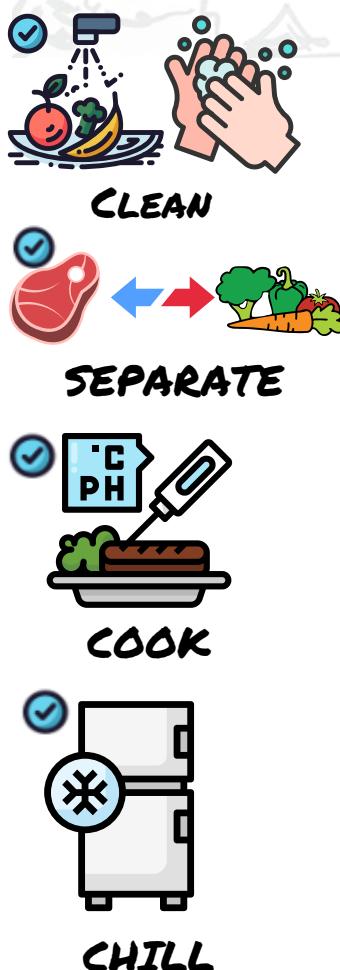
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Holiday Food Safety

Who doesn't love holiday food?! Feasting is part of many holiday traditions. Keep your family and holiday guests safe with these simple food prep, storage, and serving tips from FoodSafety.gov.



Clean hands well before food preparation. Always serve food on clean plates and avoid reusing plates that previously held raw meat and poultry. Wash fruits and vegetables before preparing.

Separate raw and cooked foods to avoid cross contamination, which is transferring bacteria from raw food onto ready-to-eat food. For example, when preparing a roast and raw veggies for a dip platter, keep the raw meat from coming into contact with the vegetables, or food that does not require further cooking such as sliced, cooked meat and cheese.

Cook using a food thermometer to make sure food reaches a safe minimum internal temperature. Cook all raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops, and roasts to a minimum internal temperature of 145°F as measured with a food thermometer before removing from heat source. For safety and quality reasons, allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming. Cook all raw ground beef, pork, lamb, and veal to an internal temperature of 160°F as measured with a food thermometer. Cook all poultry to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer. When transporting hot, cooked food from one location to another, keep it hot by carrying it in an insulated container.

Chill leftovers within two hours of cooking. Never leave perishable foods, such as meat, poultry, eggs and casseroles in the Danger Zone over two hours. The danger zone is between 40 and 140°F where bacteria multiply rapidly. Exceptions to the danger zone include ready-to-eat items like cookies, crackers, bread and whole fruit.

Learn more at FoodSafety.gov

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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.



*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

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

2nd Monday:

- Shirley: 12 PM @ Hazen Memorial Library
- Harvard: 2 PM @ Harvard Senior Center
- Lunenburg: 4 PM @ Lunenburg Library

4th Monday:

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

Upcoming Grief & Healing Support Workshops and Presentations:

- ***Grief is Not Seasonal at the Ashby Library*** | 12/16/25, 12 PM
- ***Living with Loss, Living with Meaning at the Bolton COA*** | 1/13/26, 11 AM

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 some highlights.

August: We planned our fall flu clinics with our venues and partners. We provided health education materials to Boxborough for their FreeBee market. We attended August's Public Health Council Roundtable on vaccines.

September: Jenna attended the groundbreaking for the new UMass Memorial Health SEF in Groton and got to tag along on two food inspections with Food Inspector Bridgette to learn more about the educational side of this work. We met with MOC's Reproductive Health Services division and LUK's Prevention Services division. Grief Counselor Karen offered "The Losses We Grieve" in Ashby. We started our regional, annual vaccine clinics in late September with our new partner, Westminster Pharmacy.

October: Public Health Nurse Susie joined our team, and got right to work, heading to Berlin's food pantry to speak as part of an event for a visiting group of Fitchburg State Nursing Students. Grief Counselor Karen offered a "Living with Loss, Living With Meaning" presentation in Pepperell and "How to Support Those Who Grieve" in Ashby. Public Health Educator Jenna participated as a panelist in a "Positive Aging" event put together by Nashoba Neighbors with the partnership of the Berlin, Bolton, and Lancaster COAs. We concluded our annual regional vaccine clinics in late October. Our new Shared Services Coordinator, Kathryn Witherow, joined the team!

November: Grief Counselor Karen presented "Managing Grief at the Holidays" in Ashby and "Living with Loss During the Holidays" in Lancaster. Public Health Nurse Susie has been making the rounds to meet our community partners at COAs, Libraries, and beyond! Jenna represented the agency at the 2025 MA Health Officers Association Conference.

Ongoing: We are supporting a subset of 7 NABH towns working 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 involved in transportation advocacy and the new North Central MA Regional Coordinating Council (RCC). We are partnering with CHNA9 and THFCM to launch a local health micro-coalition to develop community-led solutions to upstream health policy and systems challenges.



Note: our Town Nurse Hours have been "on hold" since July 2025 and will remain paused through December 2025 while we interview for our Public Health Nursing team.

We hope to re-start these outreach events in early 2026!

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. You can also view archived versions of our newsletter while you're there!



Photos: Top -Teamwork makes the dream work! our team for the Pepperell vaccine clinic (L to R: Susie, Jenna, Dave, Dominic, MC, and Rosemary; Middle-Small world! our new Public Health Nurse Susie with school nurse Becky who used to be her preceptor.

Susie gave Becky her flu shot; Bottom- Jenna presented as part of a panel on "Positive Aging" with the Nashoba Neighbors and Berlin, Bolton, and Lancaster Councils on Aging.

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Kids Corner- Food Safety Spotlight!

by Michelle S. Scola, FNP- NABH Volunteer



This month's kids' corner is putting the spotlight on food safety, which is how we keep our food clean and free from germs that could make us sick, like bacteria, viruses, or parasites! Getting sick from food is NO fun. Symptoms from food germs include stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, and fever (CDC, 2025). These germs are microscopic, so it's important to remember that they can be hiding anywhere and to do our best to keep them out of the things we eat and drink.

Being a food safety hero is as simple as practicing these four habits:

- 1.Cook your food to a safe temperature – you can check this with a food thermometer!
- 2.Clean your hands, utensils, and kitchen surfaces to keep the germs away from food.
- 3.Separate raw meat, seafood, eggs, and poultry from fresh foods like fruit and vegetables.
- 4.Put food in the refrigerator to keep it fresh.

Here are some other ways to practice being a food safety superhero!

•Do the activities on this placemat:

www.fightbac.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2020-soyd-handwashing-placemat.pdf

•Check out the USDA food safe families activity book:

www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/2021-04/FSF_Activity_Book_NOVEMBER_2019_FINAL.pdf

•Take the trivia challenge below!

Question 1: How long should you wash your hands to get rid of germs?

A. 5 seconds B. 10 seconds C. 20 seconds D. 1 minute

Question 2: True or False: You should wash raw chicken before cooking it.

Question 3: How soon should leftovers go in the fridge?

A. Within 2 hours B. After 4 hours C. Overnight D. Next day

Question 4: True or False: You can use the same plate for raw and cooked food.

Learn more about the 4 steps to food safety here:

www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety

References:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.).

4 steps to food safety.

Foodsafety.gov.

CDC. (2025). Symptoms of food poisoning.

www.cdc.gov/food-safety/signs-symptoms/index.html

ANSWER

Answer key for trivia: 1=C, 2=False, 3=A, 4=False



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When is the Nurse in your Neighborhood?



Formal Town Nurse Hours will remain paused for December 2025 as we continue interviewing candidates for our Public Health Nursing team. Our newest Public Health Nursing staff have been making their way out into the communities to say hello and build relationships with our community partners and residents. We are hopeful that we will be able to re-start Town Nurse Hours in early 2026! Please stay tuned for details on "the plan" for beyond 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!

All About Gestational Diabetes (GDM)



November is Diabetes Awareness Month, and one type of diabetes we don't talk about enough is Gestational Diabetes (GDM). GDM (diabetes diagnosed in pregnancy) is common, affecting up to 9% of pregnancies in the US; you're not alone! Learn more below or by visiting diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/pregnancy/gestational-diabetes.

First of All: Can you have gestational diabetes and a healthy baby? YES.

If you are diagnosed, this doesn't mean you had diabetes before pregnancy nor does it mean you'll have it after giving birth. The key is to act swiftly, remain consistent, and stay on top of your condition. GDM is treatable, manageable, and something you can effectively manage. With your health care provider's support, you can have a healthy pregnancy and baby.



More GDM Facts:

- People of color have higher rates of GDM.
- This population also has a risk for GDM as high as 68% in their future pregnancies.
- Approximately 33% of people with a history of GDM will develop type 2 diabetes within 5 years of delivery. For people of color, this rises to nearly 50%.

While the exact causes of GDM remain unclear, social determinants of health (SDoH), the conditions in the environments we grow and live in, can affect your ability to care for and manage your diabetes.

Protecting You and Your Baby

Take these steps to keep you and your baby healthy:

- Get screened: Early treatment helps prevent health issues for both you and your baby. The key is to act quickly so you can start managing it right away.
- Make a treatment plan: Early treatment helps prevent health issues for both you and your baby. Work with your health care team to develop a treatment plan.

Information sourced from the American Diabetes Association

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